

THE PRESBYTERIAN AND REFORMED REVIEW

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I.

ENGLISH THEISTIC THOUGHT AT THE CLOSE OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY.

IN the ninth edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* Prof. Flint expresses the opinion in his article on "Theism" that far more labor had been expended on the theistic proofs during the twenty years immediately preceding (1865–1885) than during the entire previous part of the century. No one will question the truth of this assertion, nor, we suppose, of the one we venture to add—that theism has received far more attention since that statement was published than it did during the two decades referred to.

Several reasons may be assigned for this revival of interest in theistic questions. Philosophy, which has so often recognized a community of interest with theism in fundamental problems, seems disposed to-day to acknowledge this more than ever, and to admit to the area of discussion on equal terms with other proposed solutions the theistic theory of the universe with its bearing on such ultimate questions as those of epistemology, metaphysics, ethics, and æsthetics. So that Principal Fairbairn may say with little fear of contradiction that "Theism may with equal truth be described as either the last chapter of a philosophy or the first of a theology. Its methods, principles, formulæ, arguments are all philosophical; the systems it criticises are the philosophies; the authorities it invokes are philosophers."* It is but a step in the same direction when the Philosophy of Religion with its discussion as to the truth of theism is made by some writers—*e.g.*, Ladd, Külpe and Wundt†—a branch of philosophy, and coördinated

* *The Place of Christ in Modern Theology*, p. 402.

† Ladd, *Introduction to Philosophy*, p. 176; Külpe, *Introduction to Philosophy*, Eng. trans., pp. 20, 90–95; Wundt, *System der Philosophie*, S. 35, 642–654.

that it need not talk of negotiations or compromise with its Nonconforming neighbors.

In both Churches the subject of Foreign Missions has always had a chief place, and it, of course, received prominent attention at this Assembly. The new Convener, Dr. Henderson, a Free Churchman, and the report which he submitted, the first since his appointment, was listened to with special interest. He is a son-in-law of the late Dr. Candlish, and has already distinguished himself as one of the Assembly's Clerks and as a clear-headed ecclesiastic. It is a great and various field which he has to superintend, and he will require all the help that can be given by two able Secretaries, Dr. George Smith (the father of Dr. G. A. Smith, whose works are so well known) and the Rev. James Buchanan.

The Free Church has always taken the lead among Presbyterian Churches in providing ordinances on the Continent of Europe. It has in the different countries some twenty stations, a good account of which was given by Mr. Brown Douglas, an Edinburgh advocate, who has for years done good service in this connection. He is a Free Churchman, and continues to be Convener of the Continental Committee, but there will now be associated with him in the office a United Presbyterian minister, Dr. Aitken, of Dundee. Two more stations were added by the Union to the list—one at San Remo, another at Algiers.

I do not know that there is anything more of interest to tell, except that the *Free Church Monthly*, which I have had the privilege of editing for thirty years, has now been amalgamated with the *Missionary Record* of the United Presbyterian Church, and that a combined organ is being issued from month to month under the title of the *Missionary Record of the United Free Church of Scotland*. It has a circulation of over one hundred and fifty thousand. My own connection with the literary work of the Church will cease, at my own request, with the present year, but I shall then have the pleasure of handing the whole control of the journal to a very capable United Presbyterian minister, Dr. George Robson, of Perth.

KIRKCALDY, SCOTLAND.

NORMAN L. WALKER.

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN THE U. S. A.

THE one hundred and thirteenth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America met in Calvary Church, Philadelphia, May 16, 1901. Philadelphia, where the General Assembly was organized, was for many years the capital of the Presbyterian Church, in the sense of being the seat of its Congress. The people of the city early learned the art, as they had always possessed the spirit, of hospitality. That the spirit and the art have not been lost was shown clearly in the admirable and admirably carried out program of the local

Committee of Arrangements. The individual Commissioners were most comfortably cared for in the City of Homes. The reception which the Committee tendered to the Assembly in the Academy of Fine Arts was a notable and beautiful function. It was a most happy idea to gather together a temporary Presbyterian historical exhibition or museum to enlarge the information or refresh the memory of the Commissioners; and to say that this was done under the presidency of the Rev. Dr. Henry C. McCook is to say that the idea was splendidly realized. The excursion of the Assembly to Princeton to see the University and the Theological Seminary, and the entertainment by the University, will always be remembered by the members of the Assembly as a delightful experience. The retiring Moderator, the Rev. Dr. Charles A. Dickey, called to preach the opening sermon at the beginning of the new century, could not have chosen a more appropriate subject than the Kingdom of God. This subject he unfolded scripturally and historically with clearness, truth and force. The movement of Israel's history toward the Kingdom in its New Testament form was finely described, and the Kingdom of God in its ultimate mode as the explanation and final cause of all history was presented as the inspiration of the Church in the era opened by the twentieth century. The discourse was listened to with close attention and sympathetic interest by a congregation which crowded the church.

The election of a Moderator is always one of the interesting acts of a great deliberative body. It was made especially interesting at this time by the eminence of the two candidates, the entire absence of unfortunate personal feeling and the sharply defined issue which the election brought to trial. We who supported the candidate who was not elected, besides pointing to conspicuous and invaluable services rendered by him to the truth and the Church, thought that there would be a poetic justice in specially honoring him in the city of his birth and in his own church. From this city he had gone bearing precious seed, and now that he had returned bringing his sheaves with him, we felt that the occasion was one for his "triumph." But unhappily for his candidacy, he lived on the Atlantic seaboard; and his three immediate predecessors also lived there. It was felt that the East was a little too obviously the "predominant partner." Meanwhile, the Pacific Slope sent a candidate whose devotion to the Church's interest under difficult conditions, and whose learning and ability all were agreed deserved the highest consideration, and this consideration the majority concluded could best be shown by electing him Moderator of this Assembly. In this way the body obtained, on the one hand, in Dr. Henry C. Minton a presiding officer whose firmness, fairness and dignity impressed themselves on the body itself and gave a singularly high tone to its business sessions, and on the other retained on the floor Dr. Purves, one of its very best debaters, who was heard oftener than he could have been had the election resulted differently, and who strikingly illuminated the subjects he discussed.

Scarcely had the Moderator been elected when the Peoria plan of appointing Committees was discussed, upon a motion to set it aside. The debate, though brief, was animated, and the Commissioners were deeply interested. By a very large majority the Assembly declined to give up the new rule. On Friday morning the "districts" or sections of the Assembly met and selected Commissioners for the different Committees. The work was finished and the Committees announced on that day. It is difficult to say what opinion as to the Peoria plan prevailed after the selection. Very little was said publicly on the subject. The Committees did their work as well as and no better than Committees appointed by the Moderator.

The reports of the Standing Committees on the benevolent and missionary work of the Church were heard with great interest, and the addresses of the several Secretaries were said by those accustomed to attend General Assemblies to have been exceptionally good. The address of the Secretary of the Foreign Board, in view of the tragic events in China and the criticisms of the conduct of some missionaries, brought to Calvary Church an audience which crowded the building. Mr. Speer's account of the work of the year, his defense of the missionaries and his appeal to the Church to seize the persecution in China as an opportunity to advance the great work of the evangelization of the world, the writer of this notice thought as noble an address in behalf of missions as he had ever heard from a Secretary of any Board.

The Assembly on Saturday, the 18th, was shocked and grieved by the news that the Rev. Dr. Maltbie Babcock, whose charming personality, brilliancy as a preacher and abundant labors had made him widely known and loved, had just died in Italy. On the floor of the Assembly and in the private conversation of members his beautiful and fruitful life was rehearsed, and the lessons of it and of its sudden close were impressed.

Perhaps the General Assembly does no greater work than it does in its great public meetings, in which the representatives of the whole Church are addressed on subjects of profound and immediate interest by speakers specially selected in advance. The opening of the twentieth century offered to the Assembly an opportunity for a series of such meetings such as few Assemblies enjoy. And speaking for himself alone, the writer of this notice thinks that nothing could have done more to deepen the faith and renew and strengthen the hope of the Church than the great addresses which were made at the three meetings held in the Academy of Music, May 17. It would be invidious to speak comparatively of these discourses. Every speaker caught the spirit of the occasion and was at his very best. The most of them I had heard before, and of these certainly it is true that I never heard them when they were better in manner or matter.

One of the most important subjects brought before the Assembly was the subject of a new court or series of courts. The proposals sent down

to the Presbyteries on this subject deserve and will certainly receive very careful attention.

Every Assembly, or almost every Assembly, has before it a subject which stands out prominently as the one which determined the selection of its Commissioners, or at least compelled to itself the largest activity of the body. In the Assembly of 1901 this prominent position was taken by the question of the Revision of the Standards. Two reports were presented from the Committee appointed by the Assembly of 1900. The majority report proposed a revision which would include amendment of the text, a declaratory statement, and a new brief statement of the faith of the Church, the latter to become one of the Standards of the Church side by side with the present Confession and the two Catechisms. This was introduced by the Chairman of the Committee, Dr. Dickey, in a speech the main object of which was to show how slight the change purposed was. In the course of his remarks he praised the Westminster symbols and the system of doctrine they embodied. And it may properly be said at this point that almost every speaker who followed him, whatever side he took, gave them no less hearty praise. The report of the minority, which proposed amendments of specific chapters only, and which opposed the formulation of a new statement of the Reformed faith, was read by Dr. McKibbin, of Cincinnati, who defended it on the ground that while eliminating statements which a majority of the Presbyteries held to be objectionable, it preserved the system of doctrine which all accepted. Dr. McKibbin attacked especially the "new creed" feature of the majority report.

The Rev. Dr. Baker, representing the party opposed to change, now offered a resolution to dismiss the subject. It was on this resolution that the main debate took place. By a tacit understanding between the Moderator and the House the speakers were permitted to debate the entire question of revision, and almost every speaker not only opposed or advocated dismissal, but announced the positive proposal he was ready to defend.

The debate, which began on Thursday, the 23d, continued until the close of the session on Saturday. More than thirty speeches were made, and the Assembly sustained the high reputation it has always enjoyed as a body of exceptionally able debaters. Those who spoke were greatly helped by the presence of a large audience of churchmen, who were as much interested as the members of the Assembly in the question before the body.

On Friday afternoon, by a rising vote of three to one, the Assembly refused to dismiss the subject. This brought the report of the minority up. It was defeated on Saturday by a vote of 270 against it to 230 in its favor.

Before considering the question of the adoption of the majority report, the Assembly adjourned to meet on Monday. The close vote as between the two reports raised the question in the minds of not a few of the

Commissioners whether, even if the Assembly should pass the majority report, it could be carried through the Presbyteries. This, together with the desire which obtains in all deliberative bodies to find in a question of method a ground on which all can stand, whether all wish to or not, probably led President Moffat to offer the substitute for the majority report which, on Monday, was adopted almost unanimously. As this substitute was the final action of the Assembly on this subject I present it in full:

“A. We recommend that a Committee, as provided for by the Form of Government, Chapter XXIII, Section 3, be appointed by this Assembly.

“B. We recommend that this Committee be instructed to prepare and submit to the next General Assembly, for such disposition as may seem to it wise, a brief statement of our Reformed faith, expressed, so far as possible, in untechnical language; the purpose of this statement being to give information and a better understanding of our doctrinal beliefs, and not with a view to its being a substitute for or an alternative of our Confession of Faith.

“C. We further recommend that the Committee be instructed to prepare amendments of Chapter III; Chapter X, Section 3; Chapter XVI, Section 7; Chapter XXII, Section 3; and Chapter XXV, Section 6, of our Confession of Faith, either by modification of the text or by Declaratory Statement, but by Declaratory Statement so far as possible, so as more clearly to express the mind of the Church; with additional statements concerning the love of God for all men, missions and the Holy Spirit. It being understood that the revision shall in no way impair the integrity of the system of doctrine set forth in our Confession and taught in Holy Scripture.”

In accordance with this action, the members of the former Committee, with the addition of six Presbyters, were appointed as the new Committee, of which the Moderator, Dr. Minton, was made Chairman. The writer of this notice voted, spoke and labored privately with brother Commissioners in behalf of the dismissal of the subject. But when that was defeated, he voted heartily for the action which the Assembly took.

It has not fallen to me to be often a member of the General Assembly. Only once before this year I attended it as a Commissioner. That was in 1868. I have had the impression that it would be well if the Assembly were a smaller body, and if it met less often than it does. But my observation this year effaced that impression and induced the belief that the large attendance and the annual meeting are worth all they cost, and, indeed, that they are necessary to the healthy life of the Church.