

THE CATHOLIC PRESBYTERIAN.

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CATHOLIC PRESBYTERIANISM.

THE meeting at Edinburgh, in July, 1877, of three hundred and thirty-three ministers and elders, commissioned by forty-nine Presbyterian Churches, in twenty-five different countries or colonies, representing 19,040 ministers, with 21,443 congregations, holding creeds in harmony with the consensus of the Reformed Confessions, was fitted to show that, at least in the more literal sense of *καθ' ὅλου*, Presbyterianism has some claim to the adjective Catholic. Certainly it has its foot on all parts of the globe, and is especially active and advancing wherever the English tongue is spoken. That gathering undoubtedly tended to free it from a prejudice that has long clung to it—of being a poor piece of provincialism, a troublesome but insignificant obstruction to the real catholicity of the Protestant Church. It is singular how many of the clouds of prejudice that gathered during the cold eighteenth century over Presbyterianism as a whole, and over its most distinguished leaders of former days, are now yielding to the daylight and fresh air of a more honest and wholesome age. What extraordinary vicissitudes of reputation have Calvin and Knox undergone! Calvin, honoured and loved in his lifetime above all other men, and pronounced by such a strong opponent as Richard Hooker, “incomparably the wisest man that ever the French Church did enjoy since the hour it enjoyed him;”^{*} then looked on by Anglicans in the eighteenth century as a mere incarnation of spite and mischief; and now again, despite some blots which it is vain to deny, restored to his pedestal as the great and venerable Calvin, with somewhat of the old halo shining round his head. The name of Knox has passed through a similar circuit. In his own time he was regarded as “a man of God, the light of Scotland, the comfort of the Church, the mirror of godliness, a pattern and example to all true ministers in purity of life, soundness of doctrine, and boldness in reproving wickedness;”[†] in the eighteenth century he had become an

^{*} Ecclesiast. Polity, Preface.

[†] See M'Crie's “Life of Knox,” p. 350.

told before. But D'Aubigné did much to make that story vital, to make men's pulses beat with it, and their eyes swim with it. He has made nobler and higher-hearted Protestants of thousands of our people; he has made them not merely more staunch but more spiritual—more alive to the inner kernel, the living heart of all that is valuable in Protestantism as a religious faith. This is a great service. It should always be remembered with gratitude and honour. ROBERT RAINY.

PASTORS, THEOLOGY, AND THE AGE.

TO defend theology one needs at the present day the courage of his convictions. Popular writers have seldom a good word to say for this department of inquiry, and thinkers of opposite schools, however much they may bite and devour one another while discussing questions pertaining to the rival philosophies, find a common delight in ridiculing theologians. It is difficult to say what effect the prevailing contempt with which this department is treated by literary men has had upon the members of the clerical profession. They, of course, could not join in this popular sport without some surrender of professional dignity; and it may be wrong to attribute the reticence regarding dogma which is becoming quite common among them to a natural proneness to conform to the fashion of the world. But it is certain that since Spencer built his famous altar to the Unknowable, the worshippers at that shrine have been steadily on the increase, and even ecclesiastical dignitaries do not hesitate now to predict that the coming theology will be largely agnostic. Here, however, they may be mistaken, for discerning minds are already beginning to see that a philosophy of negations can have no coherency, and that a system must be dogmatic if it is to be abiding. Let us hope, then, that with the revival of metaphysical study, and the coming in of a more pronounced and positive fashion in philosophical opinion, there may come also a revival of interest in dogmatic theology. Let us hope, I say; though at present, it must be confessed, it is somewhat discouraging to notice, on the one hand, the diffident and perplexed manner in which some of the plainest truths of revelation are referred to by avowed students of revelation; and, on the other hand, the dogmatic and confident tone in which men of science and philosophy speak of unproved hypotheses. There is no surer way of contributing to the spread of anti-scriptural opinion than for ministers of the Gospel, through failure to appreciate the rank of theology among the subjects of inquiry, to neglect the study of it; and there is need, apparently, that ministers, if they would vindicate their self-respect, should institute inquiries regarding the dignity and the scope of their science. There may be some danger of our deferring to the oracles of science and

philosophy, until by-and-by we shall begin to beg pardon for having any opinions at all. It is distinctly said on every hand that theology ought not to live; and those who say so generally assume to say it in the name of religion. It is a long-faced, serious scepticism with which we have to deal; when it assails religion it affects a solemn tone, and makes great profession of piety. If the Christian doctrine of immortality is discarded, it is because that doctrine, as is said, presents a selfish view of life, and "altruism" is the leading idea of the new ethic. If the doctrine of a Personal Creator is denied, it is because that doctrine, according to Mr. Hodgson (*"Philosophy of Reflection"*), has been injurious to religion. If an attempt is made to write the "Natural History of Atheism," it turns out that "Pulpits and Sundays" are to blame for prevailing unbelief.

But the scientific men are particularly contemptuous in their tone. They treat theologians as Americans treat the Indians. If they mark out a "reservation," and tell them to stay there, back they come in a little while, telling them to move on. Huxley and Tyndall are arch-offenders in this respect. As has been cleverly said:—

"We shall not soon forget the imposing figure of Professor Tyndall at the top of his tall ladder, with the hammer in his awful hand, nailing up that thundering board: Take notice! All parsons, poets, metaphysicians, and moralists among men or angels, who, after this date, may desire to meditate or philosophise in the domain of cosmogony, or in any province thereunto reaching, must submit all that they think, believe, or speak, to the control of what I call Science. Given at the Board of Control of Cosmogony, by order of their godships, Matter and his mother Must-be, and signed, John Tyndall, President" (*"Philosophy without Assumptions"*).

Mr. Kirkman has himself reflected very unjustly on theologians and the Church; but this fine piece of sarcasm goes far, we confess, toward atoning for his offence.

The theologian's present duty, then, is clear. He must do more than stand on the defensive. He must reply to those who are telling him that he has no voice in matters of science and philosophy, by showing that unless these accept the aid of theological conceptions there can be no true theory of the universe. And that is not all: the world has tried the experiment (with what result is well known) of allowing philosophy to manipulate fact; it is only fair now that the experiment should be made of allowing fact to shape philosophy. What becomes of the evangelical history if a Pantheistic philosophy is adopted? We know the answer to that question. But another question just as important is, What becomes of the pantheistic philosophy in view of the historic certainty of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ? And why, again, should the architectonic genius which is seeking to build the materials of knowledge into systems of "Cosmic Philosophy" be monopolised by Atheists? It is to be hoped that Professor Flint, of

Edinburgh, will yet find time to publish his book on the "Relations of the Sciences to one another, to Philosophy, to Religion, and to Morals;" and that Professor Shields, of Princeton, having told us (though not without leaving room for serious criticism) what the "Final Philosophy" ought to be, will in a subsequent volume tell us what it is. A work such as either of these writers might produce would show, if I am not mistaken, that theology is a far more comprehensive science than some suppose; that it deals with the empirical as well as the metempirical, and has the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come.

The men of religion, we are told (in *The Unseen Universe*), ask the question, Why? But they also ask the questions, What? and How? for there is no department of thought which the preacher may not lay under tribute. Let him study, for example, the correlation of facts as they exist in space. Let him make telescopic excursions to the nebulae, and come back with materials for a fresh exposition of the 19th Psalm,—how grandly Chalmers did this! Let him study natural history like James Hamilton, and then weave the melody of bird-song into his sermons; let him watch protoplasm under the microscope, and then, like Joseph Cook, open a new chapter in the evidences of Christianity. Or, let him study facts as they are related to each other in time. Even here the centuries are only chapters in theology. The mile-stones which he passes in his journey backward are those which mark his distance from Eden; the monuments which arrest his attention are those whose inscriptions immortalise the victories of faith. In the judgment of some of our thinkers it is very presumptuous for theologians to undertake to answer the questions, How? and Why? Men who make a business of inventing big words tell us that "creation," "God," "soul," "substance" are subjects about which nothing can be said; they are *metempirical*. But is not the atom metempirical? and the luminiferous ether? Surely the believer in the unseen atom should be the last man to ridicule belief in the unseen God! Students of Divine science must insist, then, on their right to answer the question, How? They must reply to that question which science, too, must face, after she has sorted the fishes and has arranged the beasts of the field according to their kinds, after she has surveyed the order of the universe, and is laden with evidences of design. It must still be asked, How? and Who? The theologian's answer is, GOD. Theology is a discourse concerning God. How long would it take one to deliver that discourse? How far must we travel throughout the realms of moral and material order before completing a survey of the materials which pertain to this department? How much would be left for an untheological science, and an untheological philosophy, to say nothing of Mr. Harrison's "Untheological Religion," after the prior claims of theology upon the facts of nature and of history had been satisfied?

There is another aspect of this subject which deserves to be con-

sidered. Besides being a student of Divine science, and on that account interested in defending its right to a place in the curriculum of human education, the minister sustains polemic relations to individual heresies, and to organised systems of error. These relations we must notice briefly, but without any attempt to give an adequate answer to the questions which would naturally occur to one, in regard, for example, to the place of Confessions in the Church, the ethics of creed-subscription, the duty of the pulpit on prevailing error, and the like. These questions are practical, important, and in the present day are engaging the thoughts of a great many minds. Every minister (this is the rule in America) has a constitutional right to a seat in the Presbytery to which he belongs. His vote may decide that of his Presbytery, and that again may settle the fate of an overture sent down from the Assembly. So that it is to a sense of individual responsibility, and not to the Barrier Act alone, that the Church must look for protection against hasty legislation. It is not otherwise in matters of a judicial character. It is comparatively easy to keep within the bounds of confessional orthodoxy, and preach sound doctrine; but the presbyter has to study the peace and purity of the Church; her purity—hence error is not to be tolerated; her peace also—hence great caution is to be exercised in dealing with error.

Certain erroneous opinions, let us suppose, have been expressed. Are they such as strike at the root of sound doctrine, and on that account such as should be suppressed; or are they harmless peculiarities of belief which may be overlooked and tolerated? The question cannot be settled by appealing to sentiment, or by simply measuring the area of the Confession of Faith which is covered by these departures from its teachings. To deal wisely in such cases it is necessary to consider the principles which control doctrinal development, and which underlie all doctrinal aberrations. This is true also in regard to other questions than those which are matters of discipline. For, as ministers, we are related to error in other forms. What is the true method of dealing with it? What notice shall be taken of currents of thought within the Church which are setting in a wrong direction? Two methods are open to us: one is the policy of indifference—of the largest liberty—the policy of raising no questions and exhibiting no concern, so long as the errors do not amount to a positive renunciation of the Gospel; the other is the more excellent way, which seeks to counteract error by exposing it, to limit its area by guarding against its intrusion, to protect the people against it by exhibiting the fallacies which underlie it. There is need just now that those who have been theologically trained should do what they can to shield the Church from the pernicious influences of false doctrine. These influences come from opposite quarters. On the one hand, there is danger lest the truth of the Gospel should be sacrificed to mere erudition; and, on the other hand, there is reason to apprehend that along with increased study of the Scriptures, which is a great blessing, there may come, as in some

places there has come, a style of visionary and unlearned interpretation of Scripture, which is a great evil. It is important, then, to guard against those who handle the Word of God deceitfully, and in order to do this it is important to bear in mind some of the features which characterise doctrinal developments. Take, for example, the belief in sinless perfection. It is easy to cite opposite proof-texts in condemnation of this error; but no satisfactory basis of agreement can be reached by parties who differ on this point until the principles which underlie the matter in dispute are understood. No one would claim to be perfect if he believed what our standards teach as the true doctrine regarding sin and the law. The error is one which rests upon false assumptions, and the immediate issue regarding perfectionism may be wisely left until the more remote questions respecting the extent of obligation and the nature of sin have been dealt with. This only shows, however, that popular heresies cannot always be disposed of by popular treatment.

So it will be found that a one-sided study of doctrine will often account for departures from orthodox position. Take the present Socinianising drift. It is not difficult to show that the writers who illustrate this drift are in opposition to the Scriptures in several important points. But showing this does not change the fact that the "moral influence" theory of the atonement is very fascinating in the judgment of many Christian people. If, however, it can be shown that this doctrine is a heresy, not so much in what it affirms as in what it fails to affirm; that it is consistent only as the half of an orange is consistent, and that it takes out the legal, and leaves only the moral element in the doctrine of sin and in the scheme of salvation, there would perhaps be less difficulty in getting people to see the great mischief which it is doing. The cure for this and for other heresies consists in teaching the rotundity of truth, and in convincing men that the only hope of seeing the entire surface of a globe is in turning it round. History bears testimony to the fact that doctrines tend to crystallise into coherent systems. If, therefore, we wish to understand a doctrinal system, we must first find its axis of crystallisation, so to speak. This is the way to study Romanism. The principle is so plain that no comment upon it seems to be needed; and yet what mistakes are made through failure to grasp it! We see high-church prelatists protesting against the blossoms of Popery, but watering all the while the roots of the tree that bears them. They believe in apostolic succession, sacerdotalism, sacramentarianism, and all that; but when a parish priest is conscientious in the matter of vestments, or would invoke the aid of the tallow-chandler in the day-time, immediately they are offended. The tendency of thought of which we are speaking should teach us, among other things, that to appreciate properly any single dogma, its relations to other dogmas in the system of which it is a part must be considered. Dr. A. B. Bruce has very forcibly spoken in his "Humiliation of Christ," of the ethical element in dogma as a condition of permanence. When theories of the atonement are advocated which

do not require as their correlative the doctrine of a Divine Christ, it is safe to predict that the Christology of those who preach these views will sooner or later adjust itself to their Socinianised soteriology, and that the Nicene faith will drop out of their creed. This is simple fact, which history is verifying every day. It is useless to deny that in the beliefs of men there is this tendency to logical consistency, and it is just as useless to blame men for being true to the laws of inference which govern them in other matters. It is a weak and foolish reply which is often made to the man whose consistency has made him a heretic: "Oh, this comes of your logic." When a man absconds with his employer's money you do not say, "This comes of your dealing with figures." No. Punish the defaulter, but do not legislate against slate-pencils. Expose the error of the heretic, but do not blame him for having regard for the laws of logical process. For these laws so underlie all thinking, that you would be compelled to use them in order to impeach their trustworthiness. One must be logical in order to oppose logic; and it is a difficult thing, as Mr. Kirkman says, for one to carve his goose and carve his carving-knife at the same time.

These remarks, proceed, of course, upon the assumption that our confessional theology is true, and that it is a matter of some moment to preserve it in its integrity. Those who look upon all creeds as tentative and provisional will be amused, perhaps, at this manifestation of what they will regard as zeal without knowledge. Others, again, will feel that the issues between Christians and unbelievers are so much more serious than those between Christians and Christians, that the latter may be wisely disregarded. I will not stop to inquire whether there may not be some tendency just now to sacrifice the claims of dogmatic theology to those of apologetics. Nor would I be indifferent to the great need of dealing specially with the fundamental questions which pertain to the very existence of religion, even though one believed, as one might with great reason believe, that the anti-theistic influences which are prevalent can be guarded against in no better way than by a faithful adherence, on the part of our official guides and teachers, to the whole doctrinal system of our standards. Of one thing we may be sure, nothing is gained by the policy of concession, which is so common. Mr. Arnold may be taken as an extreme instance of those minimising theologians who "endeavour to arrest for a moment the pursuing wolves of doubt and unbelief . . . by practically throwing to them, scrap by scrap, the very doctrines which constitute the claims of Christianity to be regarded as a Divine Revelation at all" (*Supernatural Religion*). Indeed, one of the curious phases of modern doubt is the eagerness which some men manifest to retain the Christian name, and to be regarded as the apologists and defenders of the Christian religion, at the very time when they are engaged in the deliberate attempt to destroy the evidences of its supernatural origin. And, what is more

curious, when an ecclesiastic intimates that miracles are not essential to Christianity (including, of course, the resurrection of Christ), his reviewer, instead of seeing in this statement an unequivocal avowal of an anti-Christian attitude, goes on to inquire seriously whether a man can be a Christian and give up the miracles. It is clear that this sort of Christianity, as one has well said, is "really a new firm trading under an old name, and trying to purchase the goodwill of the former establishment" (*New Republic*). But it is often protested against so timidly, and treated so politely, and interrogated so softly, that the evangelical reviewer sometimes does as much to weaken confidence in fundamental truth as the latitudinarian writer whom he reviews.

There is no doubt that recent discussions in science offer a great deal of material in support, or rather in illustration, of the truths of Scripture. But great caution should be exercised in this matter; for sometimes one gets a weapon from the armoury of infidelity which does more harm to the cause he would defend than to that which he desires to oppose. Thus Dr. Abbott, in his charmingly-written but dangerous book, "Through Nature to Christ," in order that he may illustrate his favourite idea of education by illusion, adopts the evolutionists' account of the origin of our belief in immortality. The conviction of the untutored man that he saw his father in his dream was an illusion; but then it taught him a better truth—gave him the idea of immortality. This illustration, which Dr. Abbott found lying in his way, as furnished by Mr. Spencer, was, no doubt, very tempting. Dr. Abbott, though he could not resist the inclination to use it, saw the objection which might be urged against it; but in replying to it he is very unsuccessful. The idea of immortality is a very precious belief, but if it is only the generalised experience of dreaming men, what is it worth? How are we to know that it is not as much an illusion as the illusion that gave rise to it? This is only a specimen of a style of apologetic writing which seems to find great favour just now. When a theory is advanced by scientific thinkers, the first question is not whether it is true, but whether it cannot be reconciled with Christianity, or whether it does not contain some new argument in support of it. So men go on defending the Gospel of Christ against objections that have no force, by arguments that have no value.

What, then, should the pulpit do? Should it ignore the controversies of the day, and say nothing about the questions which are on the lips of thinking men? Very seriously some give this advice, and very sincerely do we think that they are mistaken. The pulpit has a magnificent opportunity in these days when all ears are open to hear whatever may be said on fundamental questions of belief, and the duties of the pulpit are commensurable with its opportunities. There is room for questioning whether it is not too often taken for granted that those who habitually hear the Gospel are troubled with no doubts and beset with no fears. But it would be hard to make a greater mistake. The duties of the pulpit cannot be performed, it is

true, by preaching dry and lifeless theological formulas ; but neither can they be performed by adopting a tone of uncertainty, timidity, and doubt regarding the great verities of our faith. If any one supposes that he can wisely keep aloof from controversy by divorcing faith from practice and preaching purely ethical discourses, let him ponder these words of one of our foremost anti-theistic thinkers—"The great desire of this age is for a Doctrine which may serve to condense our knowledge, guide our researches, and shape our lives, so that Conduct may be the consequence of Belief" (Lewes's *Problems of Life and Mind*). That faith and practice are inseparably connected is one of the common lessons of the evangelical pulpit ; it is interesting to notice that it occupies such an honoured place in Mr. Lewes's volumes, and perhaps it will be better appreciated by us all, now that we are able to cite in support of it the grave sanction of a famous Positivist.

Whatever room for difference of opinion there may be in regard to the relations of the pulpit to prevailing error, there can be no reason to doubt that, in a purely didactic way, it should give a large place to doctrine. Of the preacher it should be said, as it was said of Christ, "He opened his mouth and *taught* them." We are frequently told that systematic theology rests on exegesis ; but there are also many illustrations of the fact, that a sound exegesis is promoted by a study of systematic theology. There are instances, says Professor Flint—and perhaps this is one of them—where A is the cause of B, and B is the cause of A, paradoxical as it may appear. The men who ridicule theology, and tell us to preach the Word, are the very men who betray their own lack of theological training, by their crude and arbitrary, though often original, interpretations of Scripture. It would be easy to cite examples of this false method where single words are torn from their connections, and quoted to support statements that contradict the analogy of faith ; or where texts, strung together without any other bond of connection than their place in the columns of a concordance, are made the basis of unsound and absurd conclusions. Dogmatic theology is the cure for unsound exegesis, just as exegesis is our protection against merely speculative dogmatics.

No ; we cannot get rid of theology. Men are perplexed ; they want light. If there is a sounding-line which will go down to the depths of conscious life, they want it. If there is a generalisation which will take cognisance of the facts of experience, they are in quest of it. If there is any way of voicing the world's unrest in an authorised and authoritative Litany, they are waiting to hear of it. Christianity supplies their wants—nothing else will ; and the formal statement of Christianity is Christian theology. It is a matter of regret that so many minds are turning away from Christian theology because it is an old subject, and because there are new fields which invite cultivation, and promise a larger harvest. Comparative theology has its lessons, no doubt, and some men may be professionally called to study it ; but it

is the theology of Christ and not of Confucius that we are commissioned to teach. Man that is born of woman has but a short time to live, and cannot afford to be tasting every muddy stream of religious thought, in order that he may the better appreciate the river of water of life which proceedeth out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. A comparative study of time-tables may be an excellent acquisition in its way, but the engineer who possessed it would find it a poor substitute for a minute acquaintance with the schedule of his own road. Even the study of the evidences of Christianity, important as it is, and even essential when one is professionally called to deal specifically with such subjects, may occupy too much of a minister's time. Borderland studies are not the special and exclusive province of the pastor; and if some men deal too little with current questions of belief, others deal so exclusively with the apologetic side of Christian theology that they injure their general usefulness; they spend their whole time in making clean and clear the approaches to the temple, when their proper place is within the walls, and their proper function is to minister at its altar.

But there is much to encourage us in the prosecution of theological study on the side of dogmatics. A new theology is not needed, but new theologians are; and within the old lines of confessional orthodoxy there is ample room for fresh thought, and a rich reward for patient investigation. The doctrines are few, but there is a kaleidoscopic variety of combination. The pastor is preaching, let us say, on the resurrection of Christ. Well, it is but a step from the empty grave of Jesus to the throned glory of humanity. *Cur Deus homo?* Has all been said that can be said in answer to Anselm's famous question? I do not know; but it is safe to say that no one who has pondered much on the doctrine of the incarnation, can regard "*I want to be an angel*" as a valuable contribution to the hymnology of the Church. FRANCIS L. PATTON.

THE FREEDMEN IN THE UNITED STATES.

THE Africans in the American Republic constitute a unique and most interesting class in that variously-populated land. Although the whole territory is now open to them, comparatively few reside in the Northern States. The climate of the south is much better suited to their constitution and their taste. It is generally estimated that they number about four millions in the Southern States. Some predicted their rapid diminution after their emancipation, and others their large increase; but their numbers remain about the same.

The condition, capabilities, and prospects of this people present many interesting problems to the statesman and the philanthropist, but especially to the Christian who loves the souls of all his fellow-men, and longs to see every nation and tribe brought under the dominion of Christ,