

# THE PRESBYTERIAN AND REFORMED REVIEW

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## I.

### GROWTH OF PRESBYTERIAN SABBATH- SCHOOL POLITY.

**I**N this paper it is not intended to discuss particular methods or even general principles of Sabbath-school work. The object is to set forth the course taken by the "Presbyterian Church of the United States of America," through her General Assembly and otherwise, with a view to the development, government, improvement and extension of Sabbath-schools. So far, this paper will, it is hoped, serve a useful historic purpose. But there is another purpose in view. Our people do not, as a rule, fully understand the important sphere occupied by the organized Sabbath-school work of the Church, as distinct from the work of the individual Sabbath-school. I wish to make this clear—to bring out the purpose of the Church on this particular point, to show the magnitude of the work and its complex and manifold features, correcting erroneous impressions, and demonstrating the necessity of maintaining the work in full efficiency.

The "Form of Government" of our Church does not mention Sabbath-schools. The reason is plain. When that document was originally drawn up there were—in our present-day use of the term—no Sabbath-schools. With the advent of these schools questions arose, from time to time, as to their sphere, status and government. These questions were answered, as they arose in the General Assembly, by formal acts and deliverances of that body. Therefore, to find out the view and intention of the Church in regard to Sabbath-schools we must study these acts and deliverances. The subject is much wider and more interesting than at first sight it may appear.

Scripture as "no more incredible," because they are so nearly matched by the "marvels" which science has disclosed to us? Do the discoveries which are revealed by the spectrum make the miracle on the dial of Ahaz any less difficult of belief? Does the destruction of Herculaneum and Pompeii make the burning of Sodom and Gomorrah more credible? Discussing "miracles of Anthropology," the author says: "If Balaam's ass spoke, yet other animals are now known to speak, and some linguists would argue that all speech is a developed animal function. . . . The miracles of healing under the Old and New Testaments are matched by the wonders of surgery, vaccination and chloroform" (p. 132). This is a two-edged argument. It is applicable in many cases, doubtless, but it is perilous as a principle. Just as we succeed in bringing Christian miracles and scientific "marvels" to match each other, we open the way either for the supernaturalizing of the "marvels"—which is Pantheism—or to the de-supernaturalizing of the miracles—which is Naturalism. Either of these would be most foreign to the author's general argument and, doubtless, most abhorrent to his thought.

Among the four added chapters is one on Bishop Butler's *Contribution to the Christian Evidences*, a paper which we are disposed to regard the most valuable in the book. The paper on *The Mythical Theory of Revealed Religion* impresses the reader as having been written nearly a generation ago, when Strauss was a factor to be reckoned with, and, somehow, belated in getting itself into print.

The argument of the book is not a unit; the contents of the volume are fragmentary. Dr. Shields does not seem to regard the most recent authorities in science as having added anything worthy of mention to the problem; in any case, he scarcely mentions them. He is a master in philosophy and yet he seems to have limited himself in these papers strictly to the scientific side of the question; too much so, we may venture to think, for the greatest effectiveness of the argument. We have rather an argument that Science does not contradict Scripture, than that Science supports Scripture.

San Francisco.

HENRY COLLIN MINTON.

CHRISTIANITY SUPERNATURAL. A Brief Essay on Christian Evidence. By HENRY COLLIN MINTON, D.D., Professor in San Francisco Theological Seminary. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1900. 12mo, pp. 167.

It is in such issues as this admirable little book that the series of *Westminster Handbooks*, now under publication by the Presbyterian Board of Publication and Sabbath-school Work, justifies its mission. As one of a series, among several members of which the several sections of the broad field of the Christian Evidences are distributed, it is able to devote itself to a specific section of this field: and it makes this section a veritable garden, in which the reader will find his pleasure as well as profit. Dr. Minton writes with clearness, force and eminently with brightness. He has read widely and thought deeply on the themes he touches. And he has set down here an argument for Christianity as a supernatural religion which misses nothing of importance and is touched throughout with individual character.

The disposition of the matter is as follows: There is first an introductory chapter which is entitled "The Call for Evidence." In this the nature of Christianity as a reasonable and reasoning religion is set forth. It makes its appeal to reason and undertakes—in a sense—to reason its way in the world: hence it is *preached*, that is, propagated by the tongue and not by the sword—by intellectual as distinguished from physical force. The subject

is then opened by a chapter on "Christianity" itself, in which its historical nature has justice done it: and this is followed by another on "The 'Claims' of Christianity," in which its assertion of divine origination is set forth. Next the idea of the "Supernatural" is carefully expounded, and, the way now being opened for it, the question of "Miracles" is taken up. Three chapters are devoted to this central topic—chapters peculiarly sane, discriminating, and, in the best sense of that word, astute. A chapter on "Prophecy" follows, and then one on "Scripture," where the *fact* of the Bible's existence is emphasized and an adequate account of it demanded. This is succeeded by a chapter on "History," in which the fact of Christianity as an experience of time is similarly utilized for evidential purposes. The whole closes with a chapter on "Christ the Supreme Evidence."

A mere glance over these topics and their ordering will suffice to show the eminently comprehensive and well-concatenated character of the presentation. Dr. Minton's mode of speech is always pointed and often even epigrammatic. The book is thus made a winged word and will surely carry its message into the mind of every reader and fix it there. We congratulate the Board on giving the public such a satisfactory handbook.

*Princeton.*

BENJAMIN B. WARFIELD.

**Reasons for Faith in Christianity, with Answers to Hypercriticism.** By *John McDowell Leavitt, D.D., LL.D.* 8vo, pp. 240. (New York: Eaton & Mains; Cincinnati: Jennings & Pye, 1900.) This attractive volume does not profess to be a summary of all the evidences of Christianity. Neither does it claim to be a scientific development of some or of any one of them. Nor yet does it assume to be a text-book on "The Evidences" for schools and colleges. Still less does it aim to embody the latest results of study in this department. It would simply present in a style acceptable to the people such evidences of the truth of our religion as might be expected to have weight with the people. In this it succeeds. It makes no concessions. It contends for a distinctly supernatural Christianity. It deals the Higher Criticism, or Hypercriticism as it calls it, blows which, while they will not prove fatal, are so hard and so true as to resound. Its style, though elaborate and often artificial, is usually clear and strong; its arguments are well chosen and well arranged. It will interest the general reader, and it should do much good.—**Faith and Sight.** *Essays on the Relation of Agnosticism to Theology.* By *William Pierson Merrill.* 8vo, pp. 175. Price, \$1. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1900.) The author's contention is, on the one hand, that "the absolute truth concerning God is that He is unknowable; but, on the other, that as the human race cannot live and make progress without that exercise of the religious instinct which may be loosely termed faith, so a spiritual anthropomorphism is valid, scientific and worthy of respect, being the best possible interpretation of an inexpressible reality." The greatly to be desired result of the recognition of these two truths would be "at least a truce during which conditions of peace might be discussed between the two long contending parties in the 'warfare of science and religion.'" The book is written in a clear and graceful style. It evinces a wide acquaintance with and a very high, if not always just, appreciation of the poetry of Browning and Tennyson. Indeed, the writer affirms that such poets, and only they, are "the true theologians of today." It is not strange, therefore, that he betrays ignorance of theology himself, as when, on page 79, he affirms that an "Infinite Person" is a contradiction: or that he shows himself equally unskilled in exegesis, as when, on page 83, he says, "The cxxxix Psalm is as grand a piece of inspired spiritual agnosticism as has ever been written," instead of finding in it