

SPECIAL
ARTICLES

Our Contributors

BOOK
REVIEWSTHEOLOGY, A SUPERFLUOUS
LUXURY.

By Prof. Nicholas M. Steffens, D.D.

Theology was considered, not so very long ago, to be the queen of sciences, and philosophy was looked upon as her handmaid. Some maintain that this was the case in the dark Middle Ages, but that the spell was broken when the reformation of the sixteenth century bestowed upon the individual the right of private judgment. The positivists of our day have decreed that the days of theology and philosophy are gone by, never to return again, since science—i. e., natural science—has taken the reins in hand. The so-called exact sciences are in their totality and unity the queen of sciences, or rather the only science, worthy of the name. Theology, therefore, is at a discount in many circles, and the influence of public opinion is so strong that there are only a few voices heard in favor of the neglected and ignored Underella among the sciences.

If our moderns were correct in their judgment, theology would be indeed a superfluous luxury, and the sooner and the more completely we would get rid of it, the better it would be for the world. Of course, among religious people only a few are found who are willing to go the whole length of modern thought. Most of them, who favor a compromise between religion and science, halt in the middle of the road. Even if they are willing to sacrifice theology to the Moloch of our age, they want to save religion and to remove theology to a snug little room in the attic, where it can do no mischief. More of religion, they say, and less of theology.

This is a strange position to take in our age. Is there everywhere so much theology that we have to defend ourselves against its pernicious influence? Are we signing and groaning under the despotic rule of a new scholasticism? Is there really a superabundance of theology in the churches? I can easily imagine that a Spenser or a Francke, a Wesley and a Whitfield, in times of spiritual dearth, cry out against a sterile intellectualism, but I cannot see that there is any occasion in Christian circles for such an attitude towards theology just now. We certainly are not under the thumb of an unreasonable orthodoxy; theology in its traditional form has been muzzled for many years.

The ignorance about theological matters in the churches is stupendous; religion has become in many circles a sentiment which finds its utterance in religious entertainment and work. Church life is overburdened with extraneous matter, while theology is blackballed. What is more in harmony with religion, a course in popular theology or the organization of an ecclesiastical baseball nine? It is true, however, that many of the young people in our churches know a great deal more about the intricacies of popular games than about the doctrines of the Holy Scriptures. It is no wonder that many people think that theology is a kind of nightmare which distresses and oppresses the religious mind.

Our religious anti-theologians are condescending enough, as I have said, to grant theology a kind of existence. We need, they say, theologians, but in preaching our ministers must leave everything that smells of theology or doctrine out of the pulpit. When I listen to such statements, I involuntarily think of people who defend their own positions because they know how weak and vulnerable they are.

How a man is able to preach without a sound doctrinal foundation I am unable to see. I know a sermon and a doctrinal treatise are by no means identical. But a preacher is God's messenger and inter-

preter. The doctrines and maxims of the Holy Scriptures are the message; the sermon is the interpretation of it. To preach without a message is to bake bread without flour, or to feed the multitude without loaves and fishes.

Theology a superfluous luxury? Popular theology—i. e., the knowledge of the truth revealed in the Holy Scriptures and formulated in our catechism, confession of faith and canons of Dordrecht—is necessary for every church member; and the study of scientific theology is an absolute condition of a pastor's genuine success. If pew and pulpit are remiss in the duty of acquiring knowledge, both will sink down to the level of Roman Catholic implicit faith. And this would be a calamity indeed.

THE FEAR OF DEATH.

By M. Kennedy, Fergus.

The air of mystery which most of us assume when we speak about the great change that marks the bound of our mortal progress has engendered a kind of terror that makes ordinary people shudder at the mention of death. We are glad enough to enjoy the beautiful things of life. We welcome the sun, the promise of spring, the glory of strength, and yet we tremble at the grand beneficent close which rounds off our earthly strivings. Why is this so? If men would only be content to let their minds play freely around all the facts that concern our entrance, our progress, our existence, then death would cease to be such a terror. Even in familiar conversation one cannot but notice the attempts made to paraphrase the word which should come naturally to the lips of all mortals. It is wrong to think with terror and abhorrence of the close of life; for the same being that gave us this thrilling rapture of consciousness, bestows the boon of rest upon the temple of the soul.

We should not like to see men exhibit the recklessness of the bravo, nor women the abandonment of the Amazon. We only care to see our fellow-men rise above pettiness, so that they may accept all God's ordinances with unvarying gratitude and say, "My Master will lay me aside and use some other instrument when I have fulfilled His purpose."

Millions upon millions have passed away and now know all things; the cessation of human life is as common and natural as the drawing of our breath. The one who flaunts his braggart defiance before the eyes of men is worthy only of scorn, but the soul that humbly bows and accepts death as thankfully as life is worthy of our admiration. We can do no good by nourishing fears, by shirking the bare facts of life, so let us joyfully, trustfully look our fate in the face and echo the noble thought of the mighty apostle, "Oh, Death, where is thy sting? Oh, grave, where is the victory?" Life will never be until we have learned to crush our doubts, our terrors and regard the beautiful sleep as a holy and fitting reward, only to be rightly enjoyed by those who live purely, righteously and helpfully in the sight of God and man.

Miss Symers, a well-known philanthropic lady in Dundee, has given £1,000 towards providing better accommodation for nurses and servants at Dundee Victoria Hospital.

There grows in the grounds at Holmfoot, Langholm, one of the oldest and one of the finest specimens of that Californian forest giant, the Wellingtonia, that there is to be found in the kingdom. A good many people seem to have mistaken the simple life for the silly life.

THE ANTIDOTE FOR CUNNING.

One of the penalties of belonging to a race of beings that think, seems to be the liability to think wrong. Ours is a race that is more or less easily "fooled." It is not very complimentary to our wits to acknowledge it, but, after all, every man who makes a mistake in judgment, who suffers loss, does so because he has been fooled, or deceived. Something was concealed from him; and he thought he was all right when actually he was partly wrong.

It is astonishing how cunning some men are; yet the wonder of their subtlety is equaled by the ease and regularity with which they find victims. "I have been off in — selling some mining stock," said one of those extra clever fellows to a friend who inquired where he had been. "And did you sell it?" was the question. "Sell it?" was the answer, with an almost boyish laugh. "Why, if you'd give me a piece of blue sky and fifteen minutes to talk, I'd sell it to somebody." That man represents the extreme, to be sure, and fortunately he is not typical of the bulk of the men who conduct our business, practise our professions, and write our literature.

But far worse than this is the cunning to which we are constantly subjected in the moral and mental sphere. How many men and women do we know who are not one-sided in their ideas and standards, laying too much stress upon this or that, and too little upon something else? Not one of us is free from the danger of a biasing which cunningly unbinds our judgments so that they will sometimes fall prone. We are deceived by judging everything by the few things that our own experience has brought us. Every man who makes broad conclusions on narrow evidence deceives himself; his pride binds his eyes, and he does not know it. Every man who makes a mistake is deceived by something, although often it is not easily acknowledged.

The whole human race is deceived by sin, and suffers in consequence. Some are seeking happiness by drinking poisons, others by gambling; some men are looking into the eyes of the woman whose feet take hold of hell; some pure girl is listening to the entreaties of a man who, if she entrusts her life to him, will lead her to a life of misery. In China a mother is maiming her daughter's feet for fashion; in India a poor woman is making herself poorer still to buy presents for big wooden dolls she calls her gods. In Africa a man is torturing his captured enemy to death and smearing himself with his blood. In Christian America two men are planning a scheme that will rob thousands of their earnings; and somewhere a misguided enthusiast is talking philosophical nonsense and calling it religion, and men and women are believing him. Most of these think they are doing the right thing, and each one is deceived by the cunning of sin.

The giant mistake that we all make is in conceitedly thinking that we are strong enough to recognize and defeat our temptations. As a matter of fact, all too often we are not even conscious that we are being tempted. The enemy of our souls intends to blind the real moral issue, and he is more cunning at concealing the truth than the sharpest sharper who ever came out of Wall street looking for prey.

Conscientiously we try to avoid what is wrong; and the enemy uses our own brains to convince us that we are right! Perhaps few will do wrong deliberately and coolly; the most frequent sins are not those that are entered into deliberately. Every time we have watched, and have been deceived, are surprised; we did not expect it, we were deceived. And every one of us