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## THEOLOGICAL DEGREES.

THE unfortunate clause in reference to theological degrees which was withdrawn from the recent Bill for University Federation has given rise to some criticism which seems to call for explanation, if not correction. I do not undertake to defend the special provisions of that clause, nor to lead a general attack against its critics. Least of all, would I be understood to complain of the action taken by the Anglican bishops of Ontario in petitioning against the clause, as their action seems to have been dictated mainly by the present position of the Anglican Church in Canada upon the subject. But there are remarks in the episcopal petition, as well as in other criticisms of the proposed legislation, which might be interpreted as implying a misapprehension on the subject of theological degrees, that would be injurious to the interests of theological education, if not to the wider interests of superior education in all departments.

It seems to be taken for granted that a degree in theology is an ecclesiastical distinction, and that therefore the conditions under which it should be conferred must be determined by ecclesiastical bodies. It is not the first time that this misapprehension has found expression in Canada, and has operated unjustly against theological learning by withholding from it its proper academical recognition. For a theological, like any other, degree is an academical distinction, and can in no proper sense be called ecclesiastical. The mistake of making it ecclesiastical has its origin probably in two sources.

In the first place, an ecclesiastical body may of course, like any other corporation, enact whatever regulations seem expedient to determine the conditions of admission to all its offices and the duties devolving on the incumbents of these. It is therefore clearly within its rights when it takes upon itself to decide what distinctions—*theological, scientific, literary, or political*—its clergy may be allowed to accept. It may, quite legitimately, prohibit its clergy from becoming fellows of a geological or chemical society, from wearing the decoration of any legion of honour or order of knighthood. It might, indeed, be a very fair question, whether it would be wise, on the part of any ecclesiastical body, to interfere in such a way with the liberty of its clergy; but the mere legality of the interference is indisputable. And, in truth, it would not be altogether unintelligible if a religious denomination of strong Protestant sentiment objected to any of its clergy accepting a theological degree from an Ultramontane university, supposing it probable or possible that such a degree might be offered; and objections might conceivably be raised by a denomination of untarnished orthodoxy to its clergy receiving such a distinction from an university where rationalism was rampant. Many men would also be in full sympathy with any church which, in defence of its own self-respect, protested against its ministers recognising the degrees of an university which prostituted its chartered powers by bartering its honours for money, or scattering them promiscuously among the community without any reason-

able regard for the qualifications of the persons thus distinguished. But no action of any religious body in this direction would imply that it arrogated to itself the right of determining the conditions under which such distinctions should be conferred. Our Protestant churches, at least, do not claim to be the proper sources of scientific and literary honours, of honours bestowed in recognition of purely intellectual work. Of the Church of Rome I do not speak. On its theory, if I understand it correctly, the Papal Chair has the right to determine the character, not of theological education alone, but of education in all departments. The theory, however, is based on a conception of the relation between Church and State which the British Constitution has for centuries rejected, and which, it may be presumed, is not to be recognised in the Province of Ontario.

A second source of the misapprehension with regard to the theological degrees is to be found in the fact that these are generally held by clergymen. The reason of this, however, may be readily discovered without assuming that a degree in theology is a purely clerical honour. In the very nature of the case, the great majority of those who devote themselves to theological learning must be clergymen, who must, therefore, most commonly be the recipients of those honours by which such learning is distinguished. For a similar reason degrees in the Faculty of Law naturally fall for the most part to lawyers, and degrees in medicine to the medical practitioner. It is on this account that such degrees are commonly distinguished from those given in the Faculty of Arts by the name of *professional* degrees. But in none of the so-called professional faculties is a degree understood to be conferred merely as a recognition of professional success. No university laureates a man with the honours of its Faculties of Law or Medicine because he has formed an extensive practice and enjoys very liberal fees. In like manner a clergyman may succeed to the fattest living in his church, he may even be not only a popular preacher, but an earnest and useful pastor, without being thereby entitled to receive the honours of theological scholarship. It is not work done in the practice of a profession, but rather work done in the intellectual mastery of its theory, which an university seeks to reward. Now this theoretical work may be, and often is, done by men who have no intention of practising the profession with which the work is connected; and such purely theoretical interest in professional studies is to be met with perhaps more frequently in theology than in any other faculty.

Among those who have contributed to the literature of jurisprudence or medical science, I am not certain that there are many who have not at one time been engaged in the practice of the legal or medical professions; but the history of theology furnishes a long list of eminent men who never were ordained to any clerical office. This has been especially the case in Germany, where theological learning has for generations been cultivated with an enthusiasm and a thoroughness which no other country has equalled. The truth is that even among the names which are most familiar to English readers as representing the recent theology of Germany, a large number belong to men who were never admitted to clerical orders, who were never even theological professors, but are or have been occupants of chairs in the Faculty of Arts. Consequently it is not uncommon in Germany for laymen to hold the degree of Doctor of Divinity. For instance, it may be mentioned that the Chevalier Bunsen (whom I select simply on account of the familiarity of his name in England) was very appropriately honoured with this degree as a recognition of his valuable contributions to the literature of theology; and at the fifth centenary of the University of Heidelberg, which was celebrated last August, the first of the honorary degrees conferred was that of D.D. on His Royal Highness the Grand Duke Frederick of Baden. Unfortunately, this academical recognition of lay-students of theology is not so familiar in English-speaking communities, though it is not unknown. Dr. Kitto, who at least did valuable work in popularising the results of Biblical learning in his day, was at once a layman and a Doctor in Divinity, though it must be confessed, perhaps not altogether to the credit of British Universities, that he had to go to a German University for the recognition of his services. It is but fair to the Scottish Universities, however, to mention that, though they have not, so far as I know, conferred the honorary degree of D.D. on any layman, yet they have not restricted the honour to clergymen of the Church of Scotland, but have for a long time, with apparent impartiality, conferred it upon eminent divines without regard to their denominational connection. Moreover, the inferior degree of Bachelor in Divinity, which