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LOGIC AND LITERATURE.*



THE vast vocabulary of scorn scarcely contains a sufficiency of epithets to enable writers of modern times to express their opinion of the philosophy of the period which they style the Dark Ages. At that time according to a distinguished English poet :

"Faith, Gospel, all, seemed made to be disputed,
And none had sense enough to be confuted."

"Theology and philosophy were whipped into rags by the schoolmen," says another critic. "Instead of raising fresh crops of corn,"—cries a third, "these monkish philosophers kept vainly threshing the same straw, and winnowing the same chaff," and so on *ad infinitum*. To say that these accusations were utterly groundless would be to take rather a bold stand, yet it is safe to affirm that the cause of the abuses, such as they were, cannot be attributed to the scholastic system of philosophy, but rather to the too great subtlety of thought and fondness for discussion found in such men as Duns Scot. Nor do we find that the schoolmen of the Middle Ages were the first philosophers to be misrepresented and assailed opprobriously, for four centuries before the Christian era the bitter satire of Aristophanes set all Athens laughing at Socrates and his "Thinking Shop" where youths were taught "to make the worse appear the better reason." Certainly there were

mediæval philosophers whose love of disputation betrayed them into lengthy and valueless dissertations and discourses upon trivial subjects, but to decry a whole system because of the errors or excesses of some of its real or pretended followers is a course of conduct much less worthy of philosophers than all the logomachies which the Scholastics are said to have waged. It is doubtful however whether scholastic philosophy will ever completely recover from the wounds inflicted upon it by the shafts of ridicule, the most deadly weapon, perhaps, when employed by skilful hands, with which a theory or set of theories can be attacked. The many references to our monkey ancestors, tails and missing links did more than any arguments to prevent the Darwinian hypothesis of evolution from being popularly accepted.

To the great contempt in which the philosophy of mediæval times is held at present is due the fact that the study of Logic has been almost abandoned in many non-Catholic colleges and universities. Because, indeed, the philosophers of the schools shaped their arguments by the rules of Logic, because they set them forth in syllogistic form, therefore these rules are but trammels from which the truly philosophic mind must seek to escape, therefore the syllogism is a cast iron invention, a procustean bed to which none but a barbarian will try to accommodate every reasoning. Man, they say, was accustomed to reason before any principles of logic were ever

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