

KNOX COLLEGE.

OPENING THE SESSION OF 1877-78.

Last Wednesday, at noon, Knox College was opened for the session of 1877-78, in presence of a large number of ladies and gentlemen. Rev. Principal Caven occupied the chair, and there were along with him on the platform Revs. Professors Gregg and McLaren, Revs. Drs. Topp and Reid, and Rev. W. Fraser, of Bondhead. In the body of the hall there was a large number of ministers from Ontario, and several from Quebec.

The Chairman, in opening, gave out a psalm, after the singing of which he read a portion of Scripture.

Rev. Dr. Topp then offered up a prayer, after which

The Chairman read his opening lecture, entitled "Theology and Religion," as follows:—

"It is not uncommon at present to hear theology spoken of in unfavourable contrast with religion. Theology, it is said, is not the friend but the foe of religion, and if religion would flourish theology must be driven from the place it has so long by usurpation held. It may be that the censures pronounced upon theology are really directed against one special type of it, but they seem to be levelled at theology in general; and the allegation is that this science, in its whole history, has been the antagonist of religion. In past ages theology was often assailed by sceptical or irreligious men, but it sounds strange to hear it denounced in the interest of religion and piety. But so it is, and we now hear much of minds, reverent, conscientious, and pure, who are kept from entering the paths of religion by the accumulation of rubbish in the shape of theology which obstructs their way. In fact it is represented as if in the present day men were deterred from a religious life not so much by an unbelieving heart, carnal and worldly affections, and evil habits, as by the portentous work of the theologians.

Many who would not speak of theology in terms of reprobation, do yet compare it with religion in a way which certainly does it injustice, and which appears to be founded on mistake as to its nature, method, and aims. Religion is said to be divine, whereas theology is purely a human product. Religion is fixed and permanent, whereas every age gives birth to its own theology. Theologians are to be allowed, just as philosophers are to be allowed; they are the necessary product of speculation actively directed towards religion, but they must be carefully distinguished from religion, and must abstain from claiming for themselves any character of authority. The Churches must not attach too much importance to their theologians, nor dream of identifying them with that word, "which liveth and abideth for ever." Unity and charity must suffer, and the development of religious life be hindered, if a very high place be assigned to theological systems.

Between these two ways of speaking of theology now represented, there are many intermediate degrees of depreciation with which it is visited; and we may safely say that no person moderately acquainted with the literature of the period is unaware of the fact that theology is a good deal spoken against, and very zealous attempts made to persuade us that it is a thing of no value to the Church.

Now, there seems not a little confusion of thought in the contrasts drawn between religion and theology, to the disparagement of the latter; and it may not be without importance to inquire with some care what is the true conception of the one and the other, and what is the relation between them; and thus to see whether theology and religion are not both injured when the former is spoken of as purely a human product—a passing mood of the human mind attempting to philosophise upon the supernatural.

To speak first of religion: There is a very important sense of the term in which it is a thing to be affirmed of persons, and in which, of course, it cannot be confounded with theology. In this sense it is a thing both of the heart and the life—both of the nature and the acts. Many definitions of it have been given: e.g., "The recognition of the mutual relation between God and the world," "The recognition of a superhuman causality in the human soul and life," "The feeling of absolute dependence," "The observance of the moral law as a divine institution," (Kant); "Faith in the moral order of the universe," (Fichte). It is not necessary to endorse any of these definitions, nor to frame one for ourselves. But, as usually employed in a subjective sense, it embraces reverence towards God, trust, love; in general such a state of the soul as is pleasing to Him. So much is clear, whatever etymology of the word shall be preferred. But religion as a personal thing also embraces obedience to the divine will in actions of an outward kind: "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this: To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." Thus when we speak of religion as a characteristic of individual men, or of communities, we have two elements in it, one subjective, the other objective; one relating to the mind and heart, the other to the life and actions.

Were the term religion employed only in the sense now explained, it were very necessary to proclaim that religion is one thing and theology another, for no man could possibly think of identifying them; but nothing which might be said in praise of religion would have any value as showing that theology is worth less or of little account, or that there is no important connection between the two things; or that the one is divine and permanent, the other human and variable. The idea of religion, in the personal sense of it, afford no basis for any such comparison. The whole question as to the relations between religion and theology remains to be considered; for certainly nothing contained in any right conception of religion as a personal thing, shows that no such relations exist, while there is much to suggest the contrary. If religion be "the recognition of the mutual relation between God and the world," it may be the office of theology to teach us

what that relation is. If religion be "the observance of the moral law as a divine institution," it may derive upon theology to make us acquainted with that law. Even if you say that religion is "faith in the moral order of the universe," it cannot be superfluous to learn as much as possible about that order. If religion, indeed, be blind feeling, and have no connection with truth at all, then theology has no place left to fill. But, in this case, religion and theology together must be held to have lost all good title to respect.

There is, however, another conception of the term religion, in which it denotes a system of faith and worship: thus we speak of the Mohammedan, the Buddhist, the Jewish, the Christian religion. The term thus employed denotes something outside the mind of any individual—something which has an existence of its own. As thus understood, religion has its *credenda* and its *agenda*—its doctrines to be believed, as well as its actions to be performed. The Mohammedan religion embraces what is taught in the Koran regarding the Deity, the character and mission of the prophet so called, the conduct to be observed by his followers, the future state. In like manner, the several forms of paganism have their *credenda*; and if these are discarded, their *cultus* cannot remain—the foundation for it is gone. So, also—to speak of a religion which is divine in its origin—Judaism embraces the teaching of the Old Testament regarding God and man, regarding creation, the fall, the selection of a covenant people, the forgiveness of sin through sacrifice, the coming of the Messiah and the kingdom which He should establish. And thus, too, speaking of the form in which God has revealed himself to men—the Christian religion is the sum of those religious truths delivered to us in the Holy Scriptures—"what we are to believe concerning God, and what duties God requires of man." It is certainly not the latter apart from the former. The latter, indeed,—the *agenda*—would frequently be unreasonable, even unintelligible, apart from the former—the *credenda*. The Christian religion embraces the teachings of the Scriptures concerning the eternity, omnipresence, omniscience, unchangeableness, righteousness, and love of God; concerning the creation and fall of man; concerning the Redeemer, who though "He was with God and was God," "became flesh"; "who died for our offenses and rose again for our justification; who now "sits at the Father's right hand" and has "all power in heaven and in earth" entrusted to Him, to be exercised by Him for the sake of His body, the Church; concerning the Holy Spirit the Comforter, whom the Lord Jesus promised to send, and who "takes of the things which are Christ's and shows them unto us;" concerning the Church of God, and the duties, characteristic, and privileges of its members; concerning the second coming of the Lord Jesus, and the awards and punishments of the future state. We are not professing here to give anything like a catalogue of the articles of the Christian religion. We are not attempting to show how much a man must believe—or how little—in order to be properly called an adherent of that religion. Our object is simply to point out that Christianity—the Christian religion—has its doctrines offered to the faith of those who would embrace it, and that you cannot even intelligently speak of that religion apart from these doctrines. Let one deny that God is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable; that He is just and holy, gracious and merciful; or that man is a sinner, and needs redemption, or that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh to save sinners, or that Christ is universal Lord, and will come again to judge the quick and the dead—and he cannot be said to accept the Christian religion *i. e.*, the Christian faith. No professions of approving the general aim and spirit of the ethical teachings of the New Testament and of conforming to these would warrant us to say that the man who declined to accept the clear and definite teachings of the Bible on the high topics referred to received the Christian religion; even as the Mohammedan religion could not be embraced, and yet the claims of Mahomet and the doctrine of the unity of God rejected.

Thus we find that the term religion is used in at least two acceptations; in the first of which it cannot properly be brought into comparison with theology as of greater or less value, but in the latter of which as necessarily having articles of belief, it may inevitably give occasion for theological science. Of this point we shall proceed to speak.

We must here enquire, therefore, what is the true conception of theology. Theology, if respect be had merely to the derivation of the word, signifies a discourse concerning God, and we are all acquainted with the more limited acceptation of the term in which it is distinguished from other departments of the general subject of theology or divinity often under the appellation of theology proper. But we are here speaking of theology in the wider sense, not the more restricted, in which it has to do simply with the existence and attributes of God.

Many definitions of theology have been given, as e.g., "The Science of the supernatural;" "Scientific instruction respecting God," (Knapp); "The Science of Religion;" "The Science which treats of God, His nature, attributes, counsels, works, and dispensations towards the human race," (Dick). Whatever value these definitions may have as relating to theology, under the most general conception of it, they all seem inadequate as definitions of Christian theology; and inasmuch as it is this latter with which we are concerned, the following definition seems to have more to recommend it:—"Theology is the exhibition of the facts of Scripture in their proper order and relation, with the principles or general truths involved in the facts themselves, and which pervade and harmonize the whole." (Hodge.) There are doubtless truths of natural religion, and theology has to do with these; but inasmuch as the Scriptures embrace all these truths, the definition last given is not to be faulted for making no reference to any truths or facts beyond those of the Bible. The inspired Word contains all the material of Christian theology; and it is not at liberty to incorporate into itself anything foreign to the Bible, or inconsistent there-

with. Let this fact be kept steadily in view, for it is vital to any right appreciation of the question under consideration. Christian theology is not based on mental science, or on moral philosophy, or on the opinions which men have entertained regarding religion; it is convicted of illegitimacy in its procedure as soon as it dogmatizes on any point regarding which Scripture is silent, or in any way ceases to be amenable to the oracles of God.

Now, we have already seen that the Christian religion consists of the facts relating to God—His works and dispensations set forth in the Scriptures. If you can give a correct description of it—a photograph of it—it will exhibit all these facts. It seems, therefore, that Christian theology has for its subject-matter the Christian religion—the facts which constitute that religion, neither more nor less.

What, then, does theology attempt? What is the object which it proposes to itself? The definition last quoted says that theology "exhibits the facts of Scripture in their proper order and relation, with the principles of general truth involved in the facts themselves;" *i. e.*, it seeks to arrange and interpret the facts in their logical relation to one another. Is there anything blame-worthy in this attempt? anything indeed which the human mind in accordance with its structure can refrain from doing? anything which exposes the work of the theologian, if legitimately done, to be regarded as antagonistic to religion, or even as the record of a mere passing mood of human thought? Theology, we say, is but the attempt to conceive religion as revealed to us—to conceive it as a whole—in accordance with the laws of the human mind. It invents nothing; it merely aims at properly co-relating the facts, viewing them, *i. e.*, not as separate and detached, but as parts of a whole; and unless it shall be said that the facts have no mutual relations, no interdependence, no connection with one another, the aim of theology must be held as legitimate and necessary. Butler, speaking of viewing moral truths in their systematic relations, says, "Whoever thinks it worth while to consider this matter thoroughly should begin with stating to himself exactly the idea of a system or constitution of any particular nature, or particular anything; and he will, I suppose, find that it is a one or a whole made up of several parts; but yet that the several parts do not complete the idea, unless in the notion of the whole you include the relations and respects which these parts have to each other. * * * Let us instance in a watch: suppose the several parts of it taken to pieces, and placed apart from each other; let a man have ever so exact a notion of these several parts, unless he consider the respects and relations which they have to each other, he will not have anything like the idea of a watch." And thus he shows us that the "inward frame of man" cannot be properly understood by any account of the principles of reflection, [appetites, passions, etc.], which belong to human nature, unless you take into account their relation to one another, and see conscience in its place of supreme authority, presiding over the whole. Then only have you a constitution of man.

The application of this view to the matter in hand—the case of religion—is not less certain and obvious than its application to the study of the human mind. If the facts of religion are to become matter of intelligent consideration at all, theology—systematic theology—is the inevitable result. It is not simply the professional theologian who will attempt to ascertain, arrange and construe the facts of Revelation in the manner which gives birth to theology; for every earnest student of the Bible seeking acquaintance with the truth for purposes of personal improvement, will be under necessity to do the same thing. The first thing attempted by the one and by the other will be to ascertain what the Bible really teaches regarding the several topics of which it treats. To this end the utterances of Scripture on these topics, in the many parts of it, will be brought together and compared with one another, so that all the light shed upon them may be availed of and concentrated. The Scriptures being regarded as the Word of God, and therefore self-consistent, will be carefully examined and their true teaching on particular doctrines ascertained. But it will be impossible to stop here, or even to conclude this part of the process satisfactorily, without having recourse to something farther. For just as when you wish to view a landscape and see its harmonized beauties, you must find some spot—some eminence from which its details may at once come under your eye—wood and stream and hill and plain; so here a position must be sought from which the several truths may be grouped and viewed in true combination. Allow one to see only in detail and at different times the woods, the streams, the green fields, the hills, and he has not seen the landscape, nor is his soul touched by its beauty. In like manner you must bring together the Scripture teaching regarding the several attributes of God, natural and moral—His eternity, infinity, omniscience, omnipotence, justice, and mercy. You must conceive of a Being in whom these perfections are united—in order rightly to think of God. And then you will not attempt to separate the consideration of what He has done from what He is; but you will regard creation and providence as a commentary on His attributes. The history of redemption will not be intelligible apart from the fall; nor the work of the Spirit apart from the work of the Son; nor the doctrine of the Church apart from the doctrine of the Son and the Spirit; nor the kingdom of glory apart from the reign of grace in preparation for it. It is impossible to conceive any person attaining to an intelligent acquaintance with the several truths of revelation unless with some measure of success, he has endeavored to appreciate them in combination and as parts of a glorious whole.

Nor let it be said that inasmuch as God has not fully revealed to us the moral system of the universe, nor even all that relates to the moral position and destiny of man, any attempt at combining the scattered rays of light bestowed on us, with the view of illuminating the whole moral territory, must prove abortive. We freely concede that the knowledge of the moral universe to which we may attain is partial, and that therefore many problems which

we might be eager to solve and questions which we might wish to discuss lie beyond the province in which we are permitted to move; but the entire and most humble recognition of this fact is consistent with affirming that the truths which we do know are nevertheless parts of a whole, and should be studied in comparison the one with the other. Audacious pride is rebuked by the partial nature of revelation, as well as by the limitation of the human faculties; but the unity and harmony of the divine operations, and the fact that God never contradicts Himself are our sufficient warrant and encouragement to compare truth with truth, and to regard all Scripture as a mirror in which may be seen the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

It will thus, I trust, appear, even from the brief and imperfect account now given of what constitutes the Christian religion and of what are the province and aim of theology, that the interests of the former are not to be served by depreciating the latter, theology being nothing but the necessary action of the intelligent and earnest mind upon the truths of the Bible. We may well, therefore, ask why it is that in so many instances professed friends and patrons of religion regard theology with so little favour. Now, it may in reply be admitted that writers on theology have sometimes forgotten the true nature and methods of the science with which they dealt, and have given us books of rationalism or scepticism instead of biblical theology; that in some cases a vain and curious speculation has been painfully indulged in; that in others the just proportion of truths has been forgotten; and thus while positive error, perhaps, has not been introduced, the effect has been very much as if it had; and still farther that there are cases in which a bitter polemical spirit has disfigured theological writings remarkable at once for their ability and soundness in the faith. But the admission of all this will not satisfy those opponents of theology with whom we are dealing, nor induce them to acknowledge that there is a large residuum of valuable theological literature, and that the cultivation of theological science under proper conditions must prove a boon to the Church of Christ. In fact you are likely to find that the theological writings which you regard as especially characterized by reverence for Scripture, thoroughness in the investigation of it, and that submission of human reason which allows a perfect acquiescence in its teachings, are the very specimens of theological labor in which they see least to admire. The conclusion is forced upon us that hostility is incurred not so much by anything the theologian has done with the facts of Scripture—the logical relations in which he has set them, and the interpretation which he has given of them—as by the facts themselves; and thus—unconsciously in many instances no doubt—religion itself, not theology, is the object of displeasure. The kind of religious writing which would alone be regarded with satisfaction is that in which the plain statements of the Bible regarding the topics of sin and redemption, man's helplessness, and God's grace, the atoning work of the Saviour, and the renewing work of the Spirit should be toned down and lightly passed over. Religiousness—religious sentimentality—beautiful pictures of the perfectibility of human nature, will be approved; unmistakable utterances as to the guilt and misery of the sinner apart from Christ, the justice of Him who cannot look upon sin, the expiation of sin by the sacrifice of the Son of God will be condemned under the title of Theology.

Theology cannot in itself be the enemy of religion, but it is justly exposed to censure in the following cases:—(a.) When it fails to read aright the teaching of Scripture on the topics of which it treats. The only authority we have seen for establishing the doctrines of theology is the Word of God, and the first office of the theologian is, by patient examination, to ascertain what Scripture certainly declares regarding the matters to which it relates. As to most of these, the teaching of Scripture, in its great outlines, is plain; and if the examination is conducted with care and humility, will not readily be mistaken. But from various causes—such as too great confidence in human reason, too great deference to a philosophical system, or to the opinions of eminent men with whom we wish to find ourselves in accord, hasty impatience in reaching conclusions, or, it may be, the natural opposition of the heart to the humbling doctrines of the word of God; we may come to wrong conclusions as to what the verdict of Scripture really is. If our examination finds in Scripture what is not therein contained, or fails to elicit from it the decisions which it really gives, in either case our theology will be at fault; and so far as the error goes, it must necessarily tend to the injury of religion. (b.) Again, religion suffers when our theology exhibits doctrines out of their connection and proportion in relation to other parts of the system of truth. Suppose, e.g., the "goodness" of God is so presented that we shall fail clearly to see his "severity," or His "severity" made so prominent as to obscure His "goodness;" suppose the doctrines of the Divine sovereignty and of man's freedom and responsibility not coming in at their proper place and in proper relation to each other; suppose "grace" so magnified that the claims of the "law" upon Christians are completely thrown into the shade, or these claims made so prominent that the fact of our redemption in Christ is not exalted to the place it should occupy. In any such case, while the several elements that should enter into the system of doctrine are all present, the misplacing of truths, and the too great or too little prominence given to them, is really equivalent to error. Too great care cannot be exercised by the theologian in observing the place which Scripture gives to the several truths. We hardly know any way in which the doctrines of the Bible can be more readily exposed to unnecessary hostility than by presenting them in a false light or a false setting. We need wisdom, therefore, "rightly to divide the Word of Truth." (c.) Still farther, religion suffers when the labors of the theologian, though in accordance with the outward measures of truth, are presented in an irreverent, proud, or bitter spirit. Humility and gentleness,

as well as faithfulness to truth, should characterize all his discussions; he should strive not so much to vanquish opponents as to gain men to the knowledge of the truth; and his reverent and serious words should leave the impression upon those who read or hear them that he is speaking as in the presence of God, and under an awful sense of responsibility to Him.

Let theological discussions preserve this spirit and observe these rules, and it must prove a friend and ally to religion, not a foe. But if in many instances its temper or its procedure have been faulty, theology in general is no more on this account to be condemned or depreciated than religion is to be impugned because many who have professed to walk by its precepts have been wicked and hypocritical men.

Space does not remain for any adequate examination of the doctrine that every age produces its own theology, and that therefore our theologians are to be regarded as, at the best, merely provisional statements of the doctrines of religion. This may mean either that it has proved so in the past, or that from the nature of the case it must necessarily be so.

(d.) If we regard the language referred to as a statement respecting the history of theology, it certainly cannot be endorsed without most important qualifications. Many schools of theological opinion have undoubtedly arisen, and after a course, longer or shorter, passed away. A great deal of theological speculation and literature once highly thought of, has been discredited, and is now forgotten. It is not denied that in all ages there have been those who misconceived some of the main principles of the Christian faith, and abetted an heretical theology, or whose errors, though not so grave, were sufficient to doom both their parties and their writings to oblivion. It is unnecessary to say that much theological writing was fated to perish, because it had not sufficient literary merit to ensure its preservation, and that its disappearance is no reflection upon the views it contained. Again it is to be gratefully recognized that there are doctrines and questions as to which the Church of Christ has been led, through study of the Scriptures, and a varied experience, to a fuller and more definite comprehension of them; so that whilst her basis in regard to these doctrines has not been altered, her knowledge has become more adequate and complete. We might instance the doctrine of the Trinity and the person of Christ, the doctrine of depravity, the doctrine of the Lord's Supper, the doctrine as to the province and functions of the Church in relation to the civil order. But notwithstanding all that is now admitted, any person who will look at the matter without prejudice can trace the continuous stream of the Church's theology, as the continuous stream of her life through all the ages since she was organized by the Apostles. The stream may now and then have its waters partially diverted into false channels, or tainted and rendered less salubrious by some foreign ingredients permitted to mingle with them, but it is not lost, nor its identity rendered uncertain. Detailed proof of this important statement cannot here be given; it is accessible to every reader of the Church's history, or the history of Christian doctrines. (b.) Our reply to the allegation of the changeable character of theology when regarded as a historical assertion will, if satisfactory, of course suffice for it in the *idem* form, in which such transitory character is affirmed necessarily to belong to theology. If it can be shown that the Church of Christ has essentially the same theology which it had in its early history, nothing farther is required to show that no necessity exists for every age producing its own theology. But the same conclusion would be reached by giving due weight to the two following considerations:—

(1) The very close connection between religious truth and religious life. Believers are "born again of the incorruptible seed of the Word," and "sanctified through the truth." If then our theology, as I think has been shown, is nothing else than our attempt to appreciate the truth—it is simply the truth as we have been enabled to comprehend it in the mutual relations of its several parts—it cannot be that theology shall have no permanent basis and substantial identity. It must have been such a basis to become the groundwork of a true religious life and experience.

(2) The promise of the Holy Spirit as the abiding teacher of the Church argues the same thing. The Lord promised to send the Spirit as the teacher, not only of the Apostles, but of all His disciples. "The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance whatsoever I have said unto you." "Howbeit when He, the Spirit of Truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth." "He shall receive of mine and show it unto you." Accordingly we again read:—"These things understood not the disciples at first; but when Jesus was glorified then remembered they that these things were spoken of Him, and that they had done these things unto Him." And so the Apostle John says, "Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things;" "But the anointing which ye have received of Him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you; but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you ye shall abide in Him." In the fulfilment of this great promise the disciples of Christ are taught aright to understand the principles and doctrines of His kingdom, and it cannot be therefore that the humble, earnest, prayerful, and persevering endeavors of the Church of God to comprehend with some true insight, and set forth for the benefit of those who shall come after, the great doctrines of the Scripture, shall be so valueless and futile as the depreciators of theological science would have us believe. To say that religion is divine, but man's conception of it human, is to propound a very obvious truism. The question is whether that conception has been and must be so remote from the truth—so imperfect an appreciation of it—so little adequate—that it can have no abiding value, except it may be value of an historical kind. But if, again, the meaning is that the men of each generation must have this conception for themselves—must have it as a living reality coming from the One Divine source, and that no generation can