

CURRENT RELIGIOUS THOUGHT OF CONTINENTAL EUROPE.

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GERMANY.

FIRMNESS IN CHRISTIAN TRUTH.

The importance of this firmness for Christianity is discussed by Rev. F. Reiff, Stuttgart, in Luthardt's *Zeitschrift fuer die Kirchliche Wissenschaft und Kirchliches Leben*. First, the author speaks of the gradual disappearance of this firmness in modern theological literature. The fact he regards as incontrovertible. About the middle of the century numerous works on dogmatics appeared, but for some time the decrease has been marked. A tendency unfavorable to dogmatics is evident. This is partly due to former exaggerations of the importance of the subject. Now the emphasis is placed on the heart, rather than on the intellectual apprehension of the truth, and Christianity is viewed as life rather than as doctrine. It was felt that speculation and fancy had taken the place which belongs to the plain words of Scripture. There are, also, other reasons for the change. The times have become less ideal, and an effort is made to reduce all to the level of reflection. The consciousness of ignorance is accompanied with resignation to agnosticism. Since the great speculative systems of philosophy lost their prominence, all speculation has been viewed with suspicion. In Hegel's school an effort was made to find the essence of all religion in knowledge; in Schleiermacher's school it was sought in feeling; but modern theology puts the essence of religion in man's practical nature, and the will is emphasized as the central power of the spirit, and as the seat of religion, which thus becomes essentially ethical.

Ritschl and his school emphasize the will and the moral element of religion, which leads to the depreciation of dogmas formerly regarded essential. Thus, of God it is affirmed that we can only know that He is love. Religious truth in general is emphasized according to its practical value. Opposing this tendency to depreciate doctrine, the author next takes up the thesis that Christianity finds its immovable basis in the firm conviction of the truth of its doctrines. The gospels and epistles base the entire structure of Christianity on the truth revealed in Christ. On this truth the individual Christian, as well as the church, must be founded. Christianity is a revelation of God; and this revelation consists wholly of positive truths, which we ourselves could not have discovered. "It shows us Christ, the eternal Son of God and the love of God in Him, and opens to us another world full of living realities." Well does Guizot say: "The human soul recognizes itself as bound only by what it believes to be truth." But how shall Christianity be built upon this basis of truth? The objective truth must become subjective. A firm basis of Christian truth is the foundation of the Christian life. The acceptance of Christian truth implies a knowledge of

it; but this knowledge is not at once perfected. Its first elements are the fundamental truths, such as are found in the catechism. To these belong the apostolic teachings of the dignity of Christ's person, and of the worth and the manner of His redemption. Less than these the sermon should not contain. The whole counsel of God must be proclaimed. That the truth preached is truth, is evidenced to us by our feelings and conscience. Our receptiveness for truth recognizes the truth presented and feels convinced. As Luther says: "The Word of God satisfies the heart, encloses and comprehends the man, so that, as if he were imprisoned in it, he feels how true and right it is." There is thus, as Jacobi affirms, an inherent impulse in my feeling to accept a truth. But, besides the intellect and heart, the will also apprehends the truth—seizing, receiving, and yielding to that truth. Fichte said: "Faith is the decision of the will, to let knowledge prevail." The objects of faith belong to an invisible world. To yield our thought and faith to this unseen world, and to God, who is so little known, requires a resolution. Greater obstacles are in the way of practical, than of theoretical, faith. The acceptance of the fundamentals referred to is, however, only the beginning of faith. After they have been apprehended by the intellect, heart, and will, the soul is to sink deeper and deeper into the truth. Properly speaking, a knowledge of divine things is possible only on the basis of faith. It is only the disciples of Christ who know the truth; and when known, it becomes a power that makes free (John viii: 32). That is what Anselm means when he affirms that we must believe in order to know. As Godet says: "A new view presupposes a new life." In no department is there penetrative knowledge, unless one yields himself to it; but particularly is this true of divine things, which, as Pascal says, must be loved in order to be known. But, with all our penetrative knowledge, we know spiritual things only in part, beholding them as obscure reflections from a mirror. Much that we cannot understand scientifically we may apprehend with a childlike faith. By constantly nourishing the soul with God's Word, it is developed and established in the truth. In this process of development the truth is more clearly apprehended, more deeply felt, and more energetically lived. A truth leaving the will idle, in that a man persistently refuses to obey it, must eventually cease to produce a firm conviction; but a truth lived reacts on faith, and strengthens the conviction. As every living power is augmented by being lived, so likewise is the will with every fulfillment of God's Word.

RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION.

In Germany, the theory is adopted that the State ought to furnish every child with religious instruction. Teachers are appointed for