

NOTES OF A VISIT TO THE UNIVERSITY OF
BERLIN.

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barked October 14, 1891, in a considerable storm. All day the weather was rough; 15th. This day was clear, with high winds at eleven a.m. We were sadly tossed and pitched, the decks being constantly swept by heavy seas, which burst the ventilators and dashed down from the passage way into the ladies' cabin, where were four ladies, two children and the stewardess, also the African boy. The two latter bravely baled out the water which dashed in and over them. Presently we heard the breaking of glass, and found a skylight had given way; then more glass, and heavier falls of water as wave after wave came thundering down the stairway. In the meantime trunks, valises and broken furniture were dashed about, and all our clothing was drenched in the plunging water. Meanwhile the gentlemen worked like men whose lives depended upon it in trying to bale out the water in the cabin, wading up to their hips, while the ship was rolling and pitching.

Ladies could only strive to hang on to their berths. Fortunately my two little ones were too young to realize the danger, and a few assuring words generally quieted them. I do not know what was in the minds of the other ladies, for they uttered no sound, although their serious faces betokened an agony of fear and of suspense which they were suffering. I was troubled not a little as I thought how the faithless might say: "Where is now their God; where is the Saviour who promised to go with them when they took their lives in their hands and went to serve Him in heathen lands?" But, praised be His name, I was enabled to rise above these thoughts, and to say: "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him," and the loving, faithful prayers of dear ones who I knew were feeling and praying for us, comforted me not a little. Thus with severe groanings and prayers, accompanied by nervous chills and quakings, but no tears, did we long for the morning. At last it slowly dawned, and shortly the captain ordered the ladies from their perilous positions to his cabin on deck. My mind seemed wonderfully active, and silently my prayers went up to our Heavenly Father for husband and friends, to whom the news of our death under such distressing circumstances would be heartrending. Fervent prayers ascended for the captain, officers and sailors, as well as for the young men, who gave cheerful and brave assistance, many with bare feet and only their night garments to protect them during the severe weather and exposure.

Here in the captain's cabin on deck we found huddled together the gentlemen passengers shivering and wet, with life belts on. We were about as scantily dressed as they, without shoes or stockings, for the gale had increased in severity so suddenly that we kept quiet, not expecting such terrible results, and afterwards it was quite impossible to find our clothes, and everything that was not washed away was soaked through and unwearable. A blanket or wrap was seized, thus we were taken on deck. The steering gear and machinery were all out of order. As daylight dawned the storm abated, and the sailors got things in better order. All the fires but one were out, and the firemen worked nearly to their necks in water. The captain's cabin was twelve feet long by six broad, and contained the settee, bureau, writing-table, wash-stand, spirit chest and shelves. In this small space twenty-six people were crowded for thirty hours. Some biscuits and a plate of sandwiches towards the end were handed round. It was pitiful to see the eagerness of the poor fellows (who had been working hard bailing water for hours) to get a few biscuits. There was no water, and lemon, ginger, soda, with a little brandy and wine, was used, but all partook very moderately. Perfect order was preserved and quiet reigned among passengers and crew.

Gradually the smoke from the funnel became greater. The captain told us we were returning to Holyhead. We now felt that the danger was over and took off our life belts. Again night came, and we wondered if we could gain a little rest and sleep. The floor and every place was wet. My baby's restlessness added to my discomfort. I put a cork life belt on the floor, folded a wet table cover over it, and sat there all night. Miss Christeman, my fellow-missionary, and a gentleman sat on the top of the washstand bolt upright all night, except when one or other dozed off and lost their balance and fell off on those sitting at their feet. Occasionally we could not help laughing at some ridiculous mishap. Well, morning came at last, and by twelve o'clock we neared Holyhead with the signal of distress floating from the mast. We remained on board while the purser procured us some clothing. Then fixing ourselves as well as we could, we went, a motley crowd, on shore and to a hotel, where we got a good bath and an excellent dinner. I cannot describe my feelings as a I realized we were safe—no tears—only sighs and heavings of gratitude to Almighty God were possible. We had a quiet Sabbath at Holyhead, and enjoyed so much the sound of distant bells and watching the people walking peacefully to church. In the evening I heard sweet singing in the street below, and the words "Wash me white as snow," "Hallelujah," reached my ears. That was all I could catch, but it thrilled my soul, and I would have shouted back one joyful Hallelujah had my voice allowed, but though no human ear gave the response, I am sure it was felt beyond the "Pearly Gates." At last we reached Liverpool, and were soon warmly greeted by dear friends. Miss Christeman sailed again for Africa on the 28th, but I was not well enough to go for a few weeks, and am staying with a relation in England. Looking back upon the past few weeks one's heart is filled with thankfulness for God's preserving care during our extreme danger. May He now spare us in health, and give us grace to continue our work for His glory more earnestly and faithfully than in former years.

The writer found himself in Berlin towards the middle of July last summer. His chief object in visiting it for a brief period was to ascertain the present tendency of philosophical and religious thought in Germany, at one of the great centres of intellectual life. For this purpose no better point could be selected than the capital of the Empire; a capital, it may be said in passing, which has undergone a complete transformation during the last thirty years. The University was at the time in full operation, single classes having attendances of a hundred and a hundred and fifty, and courses of lectures being delivered on all sorts of subjects, including not only Philosophy and Theology, but also Greek and Hebrew, Art and Literature, Law and Medicine. It was only a few I was able to attend during the time of my visit, though four and five lectures were generally taken each day. Some of these I must pass over in this brief notice, as not likely to have much interest for the readers of the *Journal*.

The philosophical students may be interested to learn that in this department I heard Zeller and Paulus. The former, a lecturer of some distinction thirty years ago, is now a frail and worn man, so advanced in years that the lecture room seems no longer the fitting place for him. The subject on which I heard him lecture is not one capable of much enthusiasm in its treatment—Formal Logic. There was none whatever manifested in this case. But, physical disability apart, none could doubt the capacity of the lecturer to handle it, and the students present, not a large number, took down what was said with the greatest care. The latter, Paulus, is still in the full vigour of manhood, and as the leading representative of philosophical thought at this great University, he must be a man of some mark. The subject of his lecture on the only occasion on which I heard him, was the ethical principle of Kant as contrasted with Utilitarianism. There was nothing very striking or forcible in the views presented. It would appear that the occupants of philosophical chairs in Germany still, as was the case thirty or forty years ago, have to content themselves with histories of Philosophy and critical examinations of Kant and Hegel. Further development along the line of Kant seems impossible and no new point of departure has been found, unless, indeed, the pessimistic theory of Schopenhauer and Hartmann be regarded as supplying one. One cannot say, if I may judge from Berlin, that philosophical study is in the ascendant in German universities at the present time.

In the Theological faculty two of the oldest professors, and both of them widely known, are Dillman and Weiss. The latter, the author of a valuable work on Biblical Theology, I was unable to hear. I understand that his classes are not now so largely attended as formerly, the tide of student life having set in towards the younger and still more distinguished men who are to be mentioned towards the end of these notes. Dillman, a tall, venerable, aged man, and a Hebrew scholar of great distinction, I heard lecture on a part of the prophecies of Isaiah. There was little enthusiasm in the class, but from my recollection of a similar course of lectures on the same book by Rodiger, a man of the same high scholarly stamp, I can well believe that those whose knowledge of Hebrew was such as to enable them to follow the lecturer, were getting important help towards an accurate knowledge of that portion of the scriptures.

Pfleiderer is a man of an entirely different stamp from those named; a hale, hearty, round-faced gentleman, on whom the great problems of the day would seem to sit lightly; though no one would suspect him either of ignorance of them or of the absence of a certain kind of interest in them. He has certainly nothing of the pale sickly cast of thought which we associate with great learning, resembling in appearance and manner a healthful almost jolly man of the world more than a Theological professor. The lectures which I heard him deliver were given in connection with a course on Comparative Religion. Some of the phases of the religions of India and Egypt, which either bore resemblance to Christianity or contrasted with it, were ably handled. There was no room to doubt the lecturer's wide acquaintance with the subject, but he confessed to us that at present the interest felt in it in Germany was not very great. Nor by those who believe the Christian religion to be the absolutely true one, could this lack of interest be very deeply deplored. I do not say the question is not a proper subject of enquiry but except in the hands of one believing in the supernatural origin of Christianity its treatment is not a little dangerous to young men not yet grounded in the faith. Pfeleiderer has visited England repeatedly and speaks our tongue with correctness and ease. As an illustration of the intimate connection beginning to subsist between the two countries in matters theological it may be mentioned that he was at the time of my visit bringing out a work in England and, of course, in English, which has not yet appeared in Germany and in German.

The two most distinguished and popular lecturers at present in the University of Berlin remain to be mentioned and characterized, Kaftan and Harnack. The former is a man of medium height and still in his prime, being only a year or two over forty. His face with its sharp features and benevolent eye and firm mouth is one of great refinement. His articulation is clear and distinct, being in this respect but the fitting exponent of a style of thought possessing great acumen and precision. Nor is there any lack of spirituality or of enthusiasm in the lecturer's treatment of his great theme. It is as far as possible from a play of dry intellect with which the students filling the crowded class-room are indulged—whether discussing the great doctrines of the Gospel, or interpreting the Scriptures, and it was my good fortune to hear him doing both, there is no mistaking the spiritual appreciation with which he prosecutes his task.

Kaftan belongs to the Neo-Kantian or Ritschlian School of Theology and is probably to-day its most distinguished exponent. It is not easy to state in a sentence or two what the principles are of this school, one which within the last twenty years has risen to so great influence in Germany. Its professed object is to overcome in a definite manner the perplexing and sterile antagonism between Supernaturalism and Rationalism or between Faith and Science and to conquer an independent province for the religious consciousness which is with it, after Schleiermacher, the great source of Christian doctrine. It emphasizes the moral element in the religious life, and wages a vigorous polemic against metaphysical dogmas. The Holy Scriptures are only the ultimate standard of doctrine, as giving us the Christian consciousness in its primitive purity. All truths are tested within the sphere of religion, as distinguished from that of Science, by what it terms "judgments of value," i.e., the test of every theological doctrine is its practical efficacy, its adaptation to man's moral and spiritual needs. God is conceived simply as love; righteousness and grace are undistinguishable. It would be out of place to go into further particulars in this article. It will be readily seen that the system is not without its attractive features, for the perplexed thought of the age and thoughtful minds will also notice that it contains a dangerous element of subjectivity in relation to the determination of truth. It is undoubtedly at present the popular school of religious thought in Germany, and it may be expected to exercise yet a wide influence in England and America.

Kaftan is doing much by his keen, incisive and withal devout intellect, to draw towards it the numerous students who are preparing for the ministry in Berlin. During my visit, he was discussing for nearly the whole period the doctrine of the Atonement. It chanced to be exactly the subject which had been handled in the closing days of the session in Manitoba College. It was mine to hear almost every position which had been laid down in Winnipeg traversed by this scholarly divine, and with undeniable ability; but in seeking to overturn the doctrine of the expiatory character of the Saviour's death as inconsistent with the character of God, and unattested by Scripture, I was very far, indeed, from being convinced of the correctness of his exegesis of the great passages in which the Church, for so many ages, has rested its faith in this doctrine.

Harnack disputes with Kaftan the claim to the first place in the Theological professoriate in the University, or rather, he is still more popular. It is a great sight to witness some one hundred and fifty students crowding the large lecture room at seven o'clock every morning, and only to be explained by a personality of great attractiveness. Harnack lectures mainly on the history of the Christian Church, including therein both fact and dogma. A year or two younger than Kaftan, he offers many points of contrast to him. Kaftan is a man of medium height, compactly built; Harnack is tall, thin, lithe, restless. Kaftan keeps his chair from first to last; Harnack stands up, if that word indeed is applicable to a posture which changes every minute. The one reads slowly when dictating important statements of doctrine, at other times more rapidly, but always with animation; the other, with his notes on his desk, never looks at them, but pours forth a ceaseless stream of bright and animated talk, descriptive now of the great events and the striking personages in the history of the Church and now of the struggles amid which its doctrines were developed; the Professor of Systematic Theology often animated, is at the same time always grave, the Professor of Church History lights up his talk with gleams of humour which sometimes evoke bursts of suppressed laughter from the eager youth, more frequently sends a smile across the class-room. Taking Harnack as a whole, I am free to admit that he is, I do not say the most profound or powerful, but certainly the most brilliant and interesting lecturer to whom I have ever listened. It would be difficult for me on the basis of the few lectures which I heard him deliver, to assign him his place among the various schools of thought. Listening to his profoundly appreciative estimate of Augustine, one would have been ready to conclude that his theology was of the most positive orthodox type. He is said, on the contrary, to belong, with Pfeleiderer above named, to the advanced school which raises its voice against miracle both in the name of science and of religion.

There were still others, Sodon, Muller, Kaufmann, Grimm, a member of the famous family of that name, whom it was my privilege to hear, but I could say little respecting them which would interest the readers of the *Journal*, and in any case, this article is sufficiently long.

Looking for a moment at the question of surpassing interest, as to the present state of religious thought and life in Germany, as evidenced by the prevailing types of doctrine in the University of Berlin, I could scarcely say that it is nearer what we count orthodox evangelical truth than that which obtained there over thirty years ago. Muller and Tholuck, who were the ornaments of Halle at that earlier period, approximated in their doctrinal views much nearer to those which British and American Christians generally entertain, than do Kaftan and Harnack, and I imagine they exercised a deeper influence on the religious life of their students, by whom, if they were less admired than the more brilliant Berliners of to-day, they were, if I mistake not, regarded with more veneration and affection.

For good or for evil, perhaps for both in some degree, German philosophical and religious thought has been influencing largely for many years the thought of Britain and America. In all the more prominent institutions in the United States, there are men like Fisher, of Yale, who have prepared themselves for their Professorships by a course of study in Germany. It seems as if the influence was for a time at least only to widen. The American students in Berlin, Leipzig and other University seats are each year counted by the score, and our own country and Church is not unrepresented. I found at least four Canadian students, most, if not all, Presbyterian, attending the University of Berlin last summer, by whom, it is unnecessary to say, I received a warm welcome.

Nothing could be more undesirable than that students should betake themselves to continental seats of learning at the earlier period of their course, and before their views of truth are somewhat matured, or that they should at any period go simply to accept without question the views of men of great learning. Here would seem to be the place to practise the Apostolic precept "Prove all things, hold fast that which is good."—*Manitoba College Journal*.