

THEOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY.

REV. PRINCIPAL MACVICAR, read a paper at the Presbyterian Alliance in Glasgow, which, like Rocky Mountain lakes, is deep but clear. Learned treatises sometimes seem profound when they are only muddy. Clear thinking makes easy reading; and the Doctor's paper, while dealing with abstruse subjects, makes them simple and plain. The following is a summary.

Treating of the relation between philosophy and theology, he said: "Theology, in a most important sense, is fundamentally independent of philosophy; its subject matter comes not from a human but Divine source, while philosophy is wholly the product of man's mind.

Theology is indebted to philosophy. The aid it receives is chiefly in the way of mental discipline, in sharpening and developing the faculties, imparting dialectic skill, and inculcating a critical spirit. This is of the utmost value to theology when accompanied by Christian humility. It leads men to distinguish between things which differ, to separate from the articles of their creed, superstitions, limitations, and excrescences of various sorts, 'to prove all things and hold fast that which is good.'

Theology has nothing to lose but everything to gain by a sober exercise of a reverent progressive critical spirit. Workers in this great field must hold themselves free to receive light from all quarters: and philosophy, rightly studied, should teach them to be not only aggressive, but also calm, judicial, and thoroughly inductive in their search for truth, should beget that true scientific mental attitude which looks facts fairly in the face and makes sure of a sufficient number of them before indulging in sweeping generalisations. So much for the benefits conferred by philosophy.

Equally obvious are the deep and lasting injuries inflicted upon theology by allowing the theories and points of barren contention among metaphysicians to take the place of Biblical facts and principles, to take the place of the Gospel, in the creeds and public teaching of the Church.

The battles of theology have chiefly raged around mediæval and modern philosophical wranglings, which in many instances have been no credit to human intelligence. They have on the contrary, often rent asunder the body of Christ, and proved the fruitful cause of skepticism. They have obscured and even buried beneath heaps of learned rubbish God's message of redemptive love and mercy to our fallen world.

The pulpit and the press are not wholly innocent in this connection. Comparative silence on their part regarding Christ as the life and light of men, and, at the same time, persistent praise of the value of philosophy, has begotten the belief that human reasoning is preferable to the Gospel for enlightening and saving purposes.

To this must be added the fact that great dominating philosophical speculations, now daily woven into popular literature and science, are directly antagonistic to the central truths of theology.

This is the case with various forms of materialism. Its universal negation of spirit strikes at the being of God and all dependent doctrines. Its attempt to reduce man's constitution to one factor, to make him all body and no soul, a cunningly constructed machine, set in motion and directed by physical force, leaves no room for either freedom or moral responsibility. He is in the iron grasp of relentless necessity, deprived of free agency, and incapable of virtue or vice as these are described in Scripture.

And all this rests upon pure assumption, for materialists have not given evidence for what they have confidently postulated. They have asserted, without proof, that all mental, moral, and spiritual phenomena are accounted for by the investigations of physicists, while the truth is, that physicists, by every method of analysis known to them, have failed to discover the source of a single thought, volition, hope, joy, sorrow, or act of conscience. When they have done their utmost the whole mass of spiritual phenomena is still unaccounted for, untouched.

Again, the hypothesis of evolution has of late permeated all departments of thought, and is used to explain the origin and growth of all things. Religious life is said to have risen from the lowest fetishism and diversified itself into all the forms of the prehistoric and historic past. Christianity is nothing more than an eclectic belief evolved out of all the corrupt cults that preceded it. This may please Pagans, Buddhists, and admirers of the Parliament of Religions; but it is in flagrant contradiction of Scripture and history.

Whatever truth and beauty great specialists may profess to see in this hypothesis, it is obvious that as it influences current theology and the belief of the masses, it discredits a supernatural revelation. It renders void faith in the miraculous appearance of the Son of God among men, and consequently in all the distinctive doctrines of the Gospel.

Evolution can not give us the birth in the manger of Bethlehem, the resurrection from Joseph's sepulchre, and the scene on the day of Pentecost. It necessarily denies the possibility of the sudden elevation of savages and cannibals to a plane of Christian life and character such as is attained by them in our own day in the New Hebrides, Uganda, Madagascar, and other heathen lands, the evidence in support of which is as scientific and conclusive as that relied upon by chemists in their laboratories.

In like manner a critical examination of Pantheism and of many other current philosophical