

ARTICLE V.

THE THEOLOGICAL SITUATION IN GERMANY.

BY PROFESSOR ALBERT TEMPLE SWING, D.D.,
OBERLIN, OHIO.

1. OF the sixty-three millions of people in the Empire of Germany, something over one-third are Roman Catholics. While France and America are the richest Catholic contributors, the German Catholics, in loyalty to the Papacy, are not surpassed by any people. Austria and Spain, and even Italy, are below Germany in their aggressive attitude.

Within recent years two important books have appeared which have struck very deep at Protestantism, viz. Janssen's "History of the German People at the close of Middle Ages"¹ and Denifle's "Luther and Lutheranism."² In Janssen's account the Catholic situation, in almost every point of view, is shown to have been much better than it had been previously pictured by Protestants; while under Denifle's analysis the great idolized hero of the Reformation appears in a much worse light than before.

2. At the close of the Thirty Years' War, when Protestantism obtained its official recognition in the Peace of Westphalia, there were two Protestant parties in Germany, the Lutherans and the Calvinists (called also the Reformed). This was the first official sanction granted the Calvinists. At the

¹ London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, and Company. 14 vols. 1896-1909.

² Luther und Luthertum. 2 vols. Mainz. 1904.

great Diet of Augsburg (1530), when the Lutherans thought to establish their doctrinal basis in the eyes of the Catholic world, they had declined to stand sponsor for the Swiss. Though Bucer and Calvin, and even Melanchthon later, sought for a fraternal union of the Lutheran and Reformed forces, nothing commensurate was accomplished. This was due, not only to the independence of the Reformed leaders, but chiefly to the development of a narrow and scholastic Lutheranism in the early years after Luther's death. It was not till in 1817-18. that the two church parties were formally united in the Evangelical State Church of Germany. Two small fractions, of about equal size, have pulled out of this union and returned to the old ecclesiastical organizations. One of these, the Old Lutheran, is strenuous for the authority of the original unchanged Augsburg Confession (*Invariata*). In their eyes this Confession, which embodies the Holy Scriptures, is as sacred as the verbally inspired word itself.

The Lutherans of the Evangelical Church fall naturally into the types of thought which characterize all bodies, as more conservative or less conservative according to the influences of modern scholarship and of science, with the mediating leaders trying to harmonize the two trends and hold them in union.

Such men as Martin Kähler and such movements as the Brotherhood Movement show that the warm religious spirit has not died out. An earlier Pietism has been showing itself, not only to be alive, but in splendid control of its field under such wise leaders as Gustav Ecke. The Evangelical Church of Germany has had its multitude of able exponents. There are no more honorable names in Germany to-day than those of Haupt, Kautzsch, Bernhard Weiss, Reinhold Seeberg, Zahn, Lütgert, Kirn, Kähler, Ecke, and hosts of others.

The great majority of the German people have been under

the intellectual and religious guardianship of the Evangelical State Church leaders. But, strangely, our interest has not been with these men. They have cruelly complained of American students that when they have visited Germany they have seemed to care more for the freaks than for the real German church; and the charge is not unfounded. But the reason has probably been that historical Christianity is very much the same in all lands, — in the German State Church, in the English Church, in the Presbyterian, the Reformed, the Congregational churches. I am afraid I shall lay myself open to the same reproach in the cursory presentation I am to give here.

3. A generation ago Strauss and Renan, and the Tübingen School under the leadership of Ferdinand Christian Baur, had attacked the supernatural in Christianity and destroyed the faith of many. The death of Otto Pflleiderer in 1908 removed the last and the ablest of the defenders of this distinctive type of negative criticism.

On the positive side Pflleiderer's ethics was Christian ethics, and not discernible from the spirit of his contemporary, James Martineau, in England. His thought was dominated by the Hegelian view of history, and by an Evolutionary theistic science. He finds God in the natural world, but he does not find a supernatural revelation. Negatively, the Gospels are the result of a blending of simple history, experiences and institutions, into idealistic and idealized symbols, which make it hard to distinguish history from idea. It is the "Idea" of Christianity — not the real historical, supernatural facts — which has made Christianity. With Pflleiderer history was only the "temporary clothing of eternal principles of reason, which alone are of abiding value"; and yet he frankly confessed the limitations of the older rationalism. He was much more than a rationalist.

4. The new movement inaugurated by Albrecht Ritschl did more than all other forces combined to break down and undermine the position of the old "Liberal" party, though many others contributed to this result.

Ritschl's position as stated by himself may be summarized as follows:—

(1) There is a historical revelation, i.e. the documents of the New Testament are decisive for theology—there is no place for natural theology, its subject is supernatural. Theology is to be Biblical and Historical as over against rationalistic subjectivism. The Historic Christ is the center of the supernatural revelation.

(2) Church Theology is to be practical and scientific, and not speculative, i.e. a clear line must be drawn between revealed and unrevealed.

(3) He affirms the objective reality of our religious knowledge, e.g. we know God in Christ, — we know the Holy Spirit in the fruits of the Spirit.

(4) He gives a psychological and scientific explanation of the fact of sin, and of the origin of sin, defending human freedom and emphasizing human responsibility and guilt.

(5) He demands a real effect in redemption and forgiveness, e.g. Christian experience and Divine fellowship are essentials.

(6) He emphasizes the Christian community as the Kingdom of God. The ethical values in Christ and the Kingdom of God attest the uniqueness of the person of Christ. The ethics and morality spring from the religion.

(7) He emphasizes the Christian Church as the medium of the facts and forces of the Kingdom of God.

Ritschl did not believe in "schools." He thought of his work more as a point of view that should give a personal and

Christocentric trend to theology and make it absolutely real and vital. Followers of Ritschl have not taken him as an absolute master, — as conservative Lutherans have taken Luther. Some have received from him only a negative criticism; others a strong evangelical bias.

Among the more prominent leaders may be named Kaftan in Berlin; Herrmann in Marburg; Otto Ritschl in Bonn; Reischle (d. 1905) and Loofs in Halle; Kattenbusch and Schürer in Göttingen; Lobstein in Strassburg; Gottschick in Tübingen; Wobbermin in Breslau.

Leaders of a more negative trend are Harnack in Berlin; H. H. Wundt in Jena; J. Weiss in Heidelberg; Holtzmann in Giessen; R. Smend in Göttingen.

According to William Herrmann, religious authority is in Christ alone, for Christ brings the sinner into immediate and powerful relation to God, in which he feels the miracle of the forgiveness of sins and of reconciliation to God. The "historical" Christ with Herrmann is not the external Christ of history, nor the Christ of Paul, nor even of the Gospels, for that transcription is fragmentary and human; but the Christ who animates history, and lives in the Christian community today. Only that in the Bible which corresponds to this deep soul experience has, or can have, authority for the Christian. Only that which secures "response" is inspired and authoritative. Herrmann therefore occupies a unique place, because he has carried to an extreme the negative and the positive ideas of Ritschl as to Christ and the Bible.

Adolph Harnack, although occupying the left wing of the Ritschlian position, in antagonism to both Confessional and Liberal, is yet much more in harmony with the Liberal as to the value of miracles. But he holds that Christ is unique and that Christianity is unique. He is one of the antagonists of the

new movement which would place Christianity in the same class with other religions.

His chief work was undertaken on a theory, e.g. he wrote his "History of Dogma" to undermine the force of the historical creeds, by showing that original Christianity has been modified and changed by Greek thought. He and Loofs emphasize the "continuity" and "totality" of Christianity.

5. But a new movement has arisen from among the younger teachers, — the Natural Religionists and Introducers of a New Rationalism. The leaders in this type of thought are such men as the following: Troeltsch of Heidelberg; Schiele in Marburg; Bousset and Heitmüller of Göttingen; Wrede of Breslau; Gunkel of Berlin; Weinel and Lietzmann of Jena; Meyer of Zürich; Wernle of Basel. The New Testament professors who hold very nearly the same positions are Grafe of Bonn; Holtzmann of Giessen; J. Weiss of Heidelberg. More or less favorable to it are Baldensperger of Giessen; Jülicher of Marburg; Deissmann of Berlin; and Schweitzer of Strassburg. The campaign platform of the leaders is to stay in the church, — they claim that they have a right to their place in the church, — and to fight. Their method is the production of cheap books and the use of public platforms for the dissemination of their principles. They are being met by church teachers in a series of more conservative books, — "Biblische Zeit-und-Streitfragen."

This movement on its positive side proposes definitely an emphasis of natural religions, while on its negative side it is a new, rationalistic dogmatism. It sees no absolute authority anywhere, not even in Christianity. The final source for all we have of authority lies in *total human experience*. The theologian must be a student of comparative religion. The Christian religion is at the summit; but this must not be assumed,

it needs to be proved. Each religion has its revelation, its value, and its unique character. This school distinguishingly emphasizes the similarities running through all religions, practically reducing Christianity from any distinctive unique place. Christianity receives all its important features from comparative philosophy and religion. Speculation is to be rejected. Facts, according to their claim, are to be primary, and interpretation secondary.

These men accept modern science as accurate and adequate. All events take place on the principle of natural causation. Religious thought must be reconstructed on the basis of the modern world-view. Nature miracle must be eliminated, as by "Liberal" and old Rationalists. They do not call any of the unexplained phenomena supernatural. They assume that every event is natural, history has its "natural" explanation, and they seek for this. They admit no chasm between the person of Christ, or revelation in Christ, and all other persons and revelations. All men, all inspiration, all revelation, all religious experience, are the same in kind with difference only in degree. The Bible is, however, the highest literary product of religious experience, and Jesus is the Supreme Revelation of God to man. Bousset says: "We worship in this Real Man, the Leader to God for every man. In faith we see in His Person the presence of God. We infer that God was in Christ."

In his "Wesen der Religion" Bousset proposes very definitely to leave out of historic Christianity the following ideas: (1) The Doctrine of Redemption; (2) The Deity (Godhead) of Christ; (3) The Trinity; (4) Miracles, and the supernatural as distinct from natural revelation.

What he sees left in Christianity are: (1) The person and simple Gospel of Jesus; (2) The personal Heavenly Father as Jesus saw Him; (3) The conviction of Jesus that God is to be

found in Goodness; and the hope of a higher and better life nearer to God, shutting out doubts and fears; (4) A life according to the good will of God, directed joyfully to work on the tasks of the world: the forgiveness of sins, the eternal hope;— under the leadership of Jesus and in the community which has grown up from Him.

When in Germany, I heard no special praise of the scientific scholarship of Bousset, nor of the "Three W's" — Wernle of Basel, Weinel of Jena, Wrede of Breslau. No one suggested that these men were uttering the last word in modern scholarship. Wernle assumes as true whatever views he wishes; and these views he asserts with all the confidence of absolute science. The historicity of fact is less important to Wernle than the probability which he offers as scientific truth. He is the despair of the scientific historian.

Professor Sanday summarizes Weinel in very much the same fashion:—

"He is not much troubled by misgiving. He has his solution for most things in Heaven and earth. And he regards it as his mission to preach these solutions far and wide. But I imagine it will leave behind in the minds of many readers a number of questions to which it gives no sufficient answer."¹

Wrede is one of the most unique and independent members of this class. Of his work, Sanday also says: "So far as I know, Wrede's reconstruction of the Gospel history is accepted by no one" (p. 76). And as to Wrede's general temper he declares, "He has all the arrogance of a certain kind of common sense" (p. 70).

Holtzmann of Giessen in setting out to write a Life of Jesus affirms that we do not have data for writing a biography of Jesus. The historical Person is enveloped in a well-nigh

¹The Life of Christ in Recent Research, p. 43.

impenetrable fog. Only some of the features appear in indubitable historical light.

Johannes Weiss of Heidelberg takes the negative and destructive attitude toward miracles. He divides the miracles (as does Harnack) into psychological miracles and nature miracles. The psychological miracles can be explained on non-supernatural grounds, and for this reason are not as a whole to be rejected. The nature miracles (such as feeding the multitude, stilling the storm, and raising the dead) are to be explained away as mythical growths. The three accounts of Jesus' raising the dead are, as historical statements, undermined in this way: First, the little girl, as Jesus himself said, was only sleeping! Second, the widow's son had been considered dead a little longer. Here is progress in the time. Third, the story of Lazarus shows a more decided growth of the miraculous, for Lazarus had been dead three days!

Jülicher of Marburg is the originator of what has been hailed as an epoch-making treatment in his article on "The Religion of Jesus and the Beginnings of Christianity."¹ All the difficulties of interpreting Jesus and the early records are boldly ascribed by Jülicher to the weakness of the writers, whom he naïvely charges with "blunders, mistakes, and great limitations." The doctrine of inspiration or even of trustworthiness would seem to be disturbing nobody, in that part of Hessia. It seems farther removed than the American Revolution!

Speaking of the oldest witnesses for the resurrection of Jesus, including Paul in 1 Cor. xv., Jülicher says, "One cannot call this long list of appearances a sure historical attestation of the resurrection of Jesus." And if some one asks why this

¹ In *Die Christliche Religion* (herausgegeben von Paul Hinneberg, Berlin, 1906), pp. 41-128.

is not to be considered valid testimony, this is his reason: "Only believers saw the risen one. And faith is little qualified to disentangle the objective and the subjective truth in its experience. The workings of both are alike."

And here, in this so-called epoch-making production, is his account of how the resurrection doctrine obtained its start:—

"As Peter had recovered himself from the first paralyzing terror, and, alone, buried himself in reflection over the great and frightful, which the Passover Days had brought, he was ashamed of his despair, and his cowardly subjection to the mere appearance [of death and failure]. Or could it be more than mere seeming [*Schein*], as Satan loved to make capital out of him, that God had abandoned his Messiah, and given up the matter of his Kingdom? Enraged he threw aside this last suspicion that Jesus had deceived him, and had himself been deceived as he was entering his Messianic career. There remained, then, only the one way out, that Jesus' death did not hinder the hope of His Kingdom, but rather forwarded it; that he through death having gone into a heavenly life would lead forth what he had begun.

"In order to make himself wholly sure, he lived over again the unforgettable moments when the beloved one had become master of his heart and changed it, and he enjoyed once more in blessed ecstasy the charm of such hours. He would not have been Peter if the Master had not alive stepped before him and called to him 'I am not dead, go, and make known the resurrection.' Joyously, the favored one then hastened and gathered the scattered company or disciples about him; and as he made known the revelation to them, it repeated itself in their circle. They too, themselves saw what they heard pictured by Peter. And it naturally did not cease with these two appearances."

Ernst Troeltsch, Professor of Systematic Theology in Heidelberg, gives a very clear statement as to what Christianity is in the view of this circle of teachers, after they have eliminated what they regard as the dead waste, and entered upon their new campaign in its advocacy:—

"One grants to Christianity the preëminence in a divine anticipation, comprehension, validation, and strengthening of natural religion; but as the very consequence of these ideas the newly-awakened Biblical criticism, and the comparison of religion set aside more and more these attributes, and leave Christianity only so

much over, as stands in agreement with the general, natural, i.e. the psychologically deducible and definable religion. Here, at the head stands psychology as that which deduces religion, as a distinct part of the natural system, out of the general laws of the soul life. No longer from the Bible or church dogma, but from the facts of the soul life does the science of religion go forth. Science conceives religion as religiosity, faith as a soul activity, and holds itself aloof from the objective teaching, as from the questionable and problematic.

"If one wishes to recognize the comprehensive natural religion, this is possible only when one fundamentally distinguishes Christianity from the churchly form, when one separates the proper meaning of Jesus and of early Christianity from the later churchly teaching, and when by the close correspondence of the church doctrine with Paulinism, one also distinguishes Jesus from Paul, and makes the teaching of Jesus alone the norm, in which alone it gives the pure expression of the general natural religion. . . .

"As a *last center* there remains over only the person and teaching of Jesus; and also here person and history appear ever more thickly surrounded by the fog of tradition, and the preaching ever more in accord with wholly definite historical situations and preliminary conditions. . . .

"There is a shattering [he says] at the heart of the system, the giving up of the churchly conception of miracles, and with it the churchly conception of revelation and redemption, and the rebuilding of the Christian conception of God under the influence of the modern world-view, conditioned on the mechanical philosophy of nature, and the doctrine of development.

"Since the religious idea has tempered itself under the influence of the new science, religious individualism broadens its liberty into Liberalism; the utilitarianism of the State Church system, into Utilitarianism as a philosophic principle; Christian brotherliness into the common rights of man; the natural moral law into the principle of the natural system of ethics; and the science of history into the science of society."¹

Whether this new movement is to remain, and gather force, it is too early to predict. At present it has definite aims. Its positions, positive and negative, are taken for life or death. And he would be a rash prophet who in the present status of the development should predict which it is to be. It is as clear as day, with no disguises possible, that it is not old Rational-

¹ Art. "Protestantisches Christentum und Kirche in der Neuzeit" in *Die Christliche Religion*, pp. 253-458.

ism coming to life again. That is dead. It is evident that it is not pure naturalism as that form of religion has been known in the past. It is no less evident that it is not historic Christianity as we have known it in experience or discovered it anywhere in the course of church history. In their statement of historic Christianity in terms of mere humanity they have often been surpassed in their grasp of the problems involved. Renan in this field remains the master, and I should flee to him at once, if this flood should burst upon us. In their best exposition of the innate forces in the soul of humanity, they are children, by the side of our own disfellowshipped American, Theodore Parker, who was too radical for the Unitarians of New England in 1840.

7. But there is a step much more decisive which has been taken by a few pronounced leaders. Turning from Christian revelation into ultimate Radicalism were such men as Bruno Bauer and Pastor Kalthoff (d. 1906). They have left far behind them such rarefied critics as Schmiedel of Zürich, Pierson, Loman, and the late Professor Van Manen of Holland, and even Professor W. B. Smith of Tulane University, Louisiana. The ultra-radicals in Germany have dissolved early Christianity into a totality of myths and legends. Doubt is expressed as to whether such a person as Jesus ever existed. The fog has become impenetrable. The New Testament Jesus is not historical but an ideal construction of the primitive Christian community, who were dreamers, idealists, seers of visions, oriental mystics, and subjects of religious ecstasy. As their dreams and ideals corresponded with the social needs of the time, these were widely adopted and slowly organized and rationalized,—which is the real origin of Christianity. These radical views are not favored in the German universities.

Ernst Haeckel starts from the side of natural science and the materialistic development theory; and as he never leaves this field he rules out not only the supernaturalism of Christianity and common theism, but also the spiritualism of idealistic Monism, of which latter his view is the distinct opposite. No single University chair in Germany approves of Haeckel's materialistic Monism, but thousands of the popular edition of his "World-Riddle" are read by the common people, who are influenced by his negative position if they do not understand his positive view.

Friedrich Nietzsche, who died ten years ago, came, through a study of the early Greek dramas and tragedies, to a classic idea of humanity striving toward its own development and perfection. There are no gods but only developed men, in whom *will to perform*, to struggle and overcome, is the highest element. He turns not only away from Christianity, but against it, with all its religious, its ethical and its moral ideals. He ridicules self-sacrifice, and calls sympathy weakness. "God is dead, sympathy killed him." He had no interest in democratic or socialistic ideals. He was aristocratic. The contribution he wished to make to the world was the idea of the Super-man, — which view has been taken up in England by Bernard Shaw. The world is to develop great souls, who are more than race, or country, or religion, or social ideals, or popular morality. Nietzsche wished immortality, and finally discovered a way to cherish its hope. We have come together once. In the future we can come together again, sometime, somewhere!

A "Monistic Bund" was formed in Bremen in March, 1906, made up of followers of Haeckel, Nietzsche, Kalthoff; of free-thinkers and physical culturists; their purpose being to establish a "new religion" in agreement with modern learn-

ing, and suited to the needs of modern men. It will, of course, in no fundamental sense be the Christian religion, but intended to replace it.

8. It only remains, to see for a moment how these living forces in modern Germany are lining up politically and socially for what looks very much like an approaching crisis. What are these Protestant groups able to do, confronted as they are on one side by an alert, a loyal, and an aggressive Roman Catholicism, and on the other by a bold, almost insolent — certainly threatening — irreligion? Of the Protestant Christians actually worshipping in the churches probably more than sixty per cent are conservative, thirty per cent Ritschlianistic, while less than ten per cent can be recorded as at all influenced by the negative views of the new Rationalism.

In the Universities, being under the control of the state as they are, and not dependent upon the religious support of the churches, the alignment is very different. The whole stress of University competition tends to bring out some new thing. The reputation of the University and the advancement of the teachers in the Universities depend upon this kind of enterprise. If the contribution is new it matters little whether it be radical or conservative, but fresh and plausible it must be. The advancement of the churches, and the bringing in of the Kingdom of God as we know it and feel its rising tide among men in the social world is not the mission of the German University system. Devotion to theoretic truth, even to the fantastic truth of complex speculation, and not primarily to the practical needs of the people and of the Government, is a no less notable characteristic of this university system. This is at least true so far as the interests of practical religion are concerned.

More than this, Germany is fatally weak in the lack of that

powerful Nonconformist middle class which has been the strength of England and the boon of America. It is also without the great social aid which the Salvation Army has rendered in England, and without which England would long ago have been in the turmoil of socialistic strife. When the Salvation Army tried to enter Germany it was jostled and prodded as an intolerable caricature of the militarism of that country.

Look at the struggling forces in their Hall of popular Government, the Reichstag in Berlin, as they appear in recent years. The Government party — the party of the princes and the Emperor — is to-day but a bare fourth of the whole, twenty-eight per cent. The Catholic party — the Centrum — excels it in numbers, having thirty-three per cent of the whole membership of the Reichstag. And the Catholic party in Germany has in recent years been receiving more favors, as the price of its support of the Government, than in any other country in the world. The Liberal or Progressive party equals or falls below that of the Government, being twenty-eight per cent. The radical Socialistic forces have risen in some elections as high as twenty per cent, but in their defeat in 1907 they dropped temporarily to eleven per cent. By popular representation, however, the proportions are very different. The Social Democrats are in the lead, being twenty-nine per cent of the whole; the Liberals twenty-seven per cent; the Centrum twenty-five per cent; and the Right or Government party only nineteen per cent of the whole number of voters.

These almost equal forces, pitted against each other as they are, may mean an impending crisis when the alignment is slowly shifted. Is the Governmental party to weaken? Is the Catholic Centrum to become more solid and dictatorial? Are the socialistic forces to recover themselves from their recent

defeat as they now seem to be doing, and go on steadily increasing in numbers? No one can tell.

The religious interests of Germany are under the management of a state church. The theological interests are in the hands of the State Universities. And the State Church and the State Universities are at the mercy of such a state.

It has been a difficult matter to withdraw from the church, and few in earlier years made the effort. But in the year 1908 ten thousand persons withdrew from membership in the Christian churches. Hardly any of these were Roman Catholics. They came from the State Church and they have gone to swell — not a solid Nonconformist Christian body, but non-Christian socialists and free-thinkers, to be active against the Government and against the Church. This is more than a straw; and it certainly seems to indicate that a great popular change is slowly but surely taking place in Germany. And more, if I mistake not, is in greatest danger of coming to pass, that shall permanently undermine the real evangelical power of the first and greatest of Protestant countries.