

ARTICLE VIII.

THE RULE OF FAITH.

BY THE REVEREND JAMES LINDSAY, D.D., IRVINE, SCOTLAND.

SEVEN years after they were delivered, Professor W. P. Paterson, D.D., of the chair of Divinity in the University of Edinburgh, publishes his Baird lectures under the title, "The Rule of Faith."¹ The work is one that will be variously estimated: the theological tyro, and the less-instructed of the clergy, will welcome it as, for them, a book of revelations; the theological expert, and the well-instructed clerics, will find it mainly a book of inadequacies. The former class will find dovetailed into its scheme a picturesque variety, — Romanism, Protestantism, Pietism, Rationalism, Ritschlianism, — and it will meet their small needs: the latter class will find its methods unscientific, and its treatments slight and unsatisfying, or, to use the author's own word, "perfunctory." Not but what a good sketch may be valuable; in pioneer work it is so; but it is peculiarly aggravating where, as in the present case, it is a reproducing, in far too bald and scrappy forms, of voluminous and exhaustive treatments. The work is not only unmarked by brilliancy of any kind, whether of thought, or of style, or of treatment; it is not in the least remarkable in any of these respects; the author himself disclaims any "novelty" for his treatment, merely having brought together ideas from many quarters, he says, and expressed them in his own way. This is not done, I would add,

¹ London: Hodder and Stoughton. Pp. x, 439. 1912. 6s., *net*.

without a certain freshness in working over his materials, and a certain quasi-independence on small points; and his book has a novelty—a very undesirable novelty—greater than he imagines. It is the most churchly and Confessional handbook of theology that has appeared in this country for many a day. That is its disservice: it has put the day of anything like a scientific theology further off than ever. The work may do well enough as a churchly or Confessional “study in the prolegomena to Dogmatics,” but the whole treatment is upon such a merely churchly or phenomenistic basis, that it remains with a radical lack of depth and grounding. There is very little pure theology in the book, and the little there is, takes popular rather than scientific form. I refrain from comment on his use of the phrase, “seat of doctrine,” for such a treatment as he has given, because I should not so much mind its being merely a regulative scheme—although much confusion of thought will be caused—if even that had been carried out in any decently scientific fashion. It does, however, register a retrograde movement in theological thought to have theology presented with such total lack of fundamental depth and grounding. This is not in the least compensated for by any pleasure one has in seeing some notice in places of some of one’s old familiar friends among German dogmatic theologians. Their mention only accentuates, in some cases, one’s painful sense of their appearing in a work so suggestive of contrast to their own finely scientific work. If the academical exegete, and the Church historian, may fulfill their functions in a purely scientific way, with regard to the truth of their departments rather than to Confessional and practical results, why should the teacher of theology write himself down as destitute of scientific ideals, methods, and interests? I do not doubt that

the author has done the thing for which he felt fitted, that, namely, of producing a useful popular handbook; but he has laid theology as science open to great injustice and disrespect, if, that is to say, it is to be at all regarded as a science of university rank, and not a mere item of denominational instruction. Dr. Paterson seems in places to write under a consciousness of the contemptuous attitudes of philosophy and science towards dogmatic theology, but what effect can his own churchly, non-scientific treatment of theology have but to confirm and deepen that contempt? He has missed a great opportunity, that of vindicating the place of theology in the hierarchy of the sciences. I write as one of those who believe a more scientific theology possible—which shall be at the same time a more philosophic one too—than this country has ever had presented, or has even had wisdom enough to encourage. “Following this path,” as Rübiger, in his “Theological Encyclopædia,” remarks, “theology pursues its purely scientific end, and at the same time serves a churchly end”; whereas Dr. Paterson has no instincts whatever for the former, having lost the scientific ideal in recurrence to analogies of “medical art.”

Of Dr. Paterson's general discussions it must be said that they are often allowed to become so general as to lose all scientific value, gaining only popular effect. Witness, for example, how the perfectly commonplace account of the “Roman Catholic Theory” is allowed to descend (pp. 53-55) to trivialities about the Papacy quite below the level of scientific theology. In the chapter on “The Genius of Roman Catholicism,” we have a discursive treatment, with occasional tendencies to elaboration of the obvious and descent to the trivial; while important aspects of the real genius of Roman Catholicism are never finely and effectively brought

out, such as, for example, the genius it showed, as contrasted with Protestantism, for translating all its ideas into institutions. Dr. Paterson gets so lost in doctrinal meanderings as also to fail of bringing into clear relief the close relation of the internal dogmas to the great external one of the Church. His thought never pierces to the real center of the strength of Catholicism, which he has sought too much in the region of doctrine, too little in the realm of fact. Precisely the same sort of lack marks his treatment of "the Protestant theory," which is very unmodern and unscientific. There is no real discussion of the Protestant principle; no reference to such an effective statement of criticism of its "onesidedness" as Dr. E. Caird's, for example, in his "Evolution of Religion," which admits, I believe, of strong reply; Dr. Paterson, in his rather antiquated discussion, sees little beyond the Westminster Confession. If Protestantism were no more than it figures as being in this chapter, I should utterly despise it. Its true glories Dr. Paterson has not seen; its inspirations he has never felt; else he could never have been so blindly indifferent to its principle. He tells us: "The use to which the liberty was put was, not to repudiate the notion of authority altogether, but to transfer the allegiance from an ecclesiastical authority that was distrusted to a Scriptural authority that was believed to rest on a solid basis" (p. 58). To fling this *en bloc* Scripture authority at our heads, without more ado or further explication, is to give the enemy cause to blaspheme, and the intelligence of its votaries cause to blush. This uncritical transference of authority Dr. Paterson makes without even taking the precaution, which some have done, to point out that the center of gravity remained in liberty, while in Catholicism it is in authority, little enough as such a precaution might be. He does not trouble in the

very least about the rights of Reason, though the many ill-instructed among his readers might well think its authority deposed by the authority of Scripture. Although Reason gives no rule of faith, it is unpsychological, and theologically unscientific, to fail of giving Reason its recognized place in this connection. But Dr. Paterson's whole treatment has suffered, because he has not taken proper account of the contentions of those who, with the best right, have held that, in Protestantism and Catholicism, we are dealing with two methods even more than with two religions. Nor does the discussion fare any better in a subsequent chapter on "the Gospel of Protestantism," where thought interests are again mortgaged by appeals to the Westminster Confession, and we are largely treated to unintelligent anachronisms. If we are to have Protestantism discussed, why cannot it be as "rich with the spoils of time" subsequent to its casement in musty Confessions? All the more is this necessary, in view of the superior progressive claims made by apologists of the Roman Catholic Church. Wilfrid Ward, for example, claims that in that Church we may see "a power of assimilation and of ultimate consolidation of her teaching in its relation to assured scientific advance, or well-examined and tenable hypothesis." And again, "this is a special prerogative of a living authoritative tribunal which, from the nature of the case, cannot be clearly asserted by any ruling power whose nature is documentary. And the Church has on occasion," he proceeds, "exhibited the principle of progressive assimilation in a marked manner." On all of which things the stagnant Protestantism of Professor Paterson is dumb, impinging as little as usual on modern thought problems. Space considerations forbid my now following the general discussions further.

Let us now turn to only a few individual points. On page 103 it is said to be an "axiom" of philosophy that it is "bound to ignore the possibilities of supernatural religion," and this is adduced as a "particular" limitation of philosophy. But how little philosophy is "bound" by anything of the sort may be seen in Dr. Paterson's own statement made just before (on p. 101), that "since Kant and Hegel, it has been realised that philosophy may not ignore the contribution made by religion to the interpretation of existence, and almost every considerable thinker — whatever the type and degree of his personal religion — has felt called upon to outline his scheme of religious philosophy." Dr. Paterson compares the "limitations" of philosophy to "the conventions by which it is found expedient to regulate games," and declares its objection to special revelation "no more convincing than an argument that, because boys may learn to run surprisingly fast in a sack-race, this marks the possible limit of their speed. It may also suggest the argument that, because one can manage to read by candle-light, the sun may be regarded as superfluous" (p. 103). No serious thinker would adopt this style of "argument" (!), and no philosophical theologian would so utterly fail of insight into the incalculable debt of theology to philosophy as to write in the unsympathetic fashion which Dr. Paterson, here and elsewhere, exemplifies. It was a philosophical theologian — the late Professor S. Harris, D.D., LL.D., Yale University — who once wrote: "When I began to give instruction in systematic theology the discussions in the class-room were continually forcing us back to preliminary philosophical questions, pertaining to the reality, processes, and limits of human knowledge, and to the constitution of man as a personal being." Dr. Paterson's eighteen years as a professor have

taught him amazingly little in that direction. Though he has not the equipment of a philosophical theologian, yet even as a theological scholar, whose pages would be a good deal impoverished if the well-worn generalities about Kant and Hegel were abstracted from them, he ought, in common gratitude, to have avoided this pitfall, here and elsewhere. On page 105 he shares, in distinct tendency at least, the old vulgar error of those theologians who did not see that, in discounting the claims or powers of reason or rational thought, they were at the same time invalidating the powers of reliable faith. Faith has often thus sawn off the bough on which it sat, under a foolish fear of Rationalism, and Dr. Paterson ought to have been superior to the tendency. On the contrary, he has no fine faith in reason as fundamental, and talks as though it were a mere case of its self-sufficiency, without the least insight into its real place, power, relations, and functions. One hardly expected ever again to meet anything so bare and bald in theology modern. If Professor Paterson had read the long lesson of Christian history aright and more deeply, he would have known all for which theology depends, and must depend, on philosophy, in such a way that he would not have shared the pitfall of many Biblical theologians. On page 118, he talks nonsense about philosophy here superseding the sciences, and fails to see the modern issue as that of those who say there are no "parallel cases," or, as the latest writer from that standpoint says, "these things lie outside the domain of experience; by scientific methods they are unprovable; and they remain accessible solely to the subjective vision engendered by faith." Dr. Paterson, with the Bible and Confession tucked under his arm, and no philosophy, is speechless.

In matters doctrinal, his treatment of the Trinity is meager

and unsatisfying. His attitude is a somewhat curious one. He begins by refusing to hold with those who opine that the object of the Divine thought must have the note of personality, which, be it said, they put forward on the tolerably reasonable ground that the reflection of God to himself must be personal to be at all adequate. He also declines to hold with those who think God cannot be a solitary Supreme Intelligence without there being "given to Him in thought" a second Being co-equal with Himself. After which, we find him among those who retail the theory of God as a "community of persons" or "a spiritual society of separate persons"—a theory drawn from analogies of love and social life. The theory is one which has received in recent years some countenance from various writers, both English and American. Some of the American presentations gain nothing by pressing points in the argument too far. Dr. Paterson's statement resembles that of C. Harris, Lampeter College, in his "Pro Fide," except that Dr. Paterson preferably omits reference to Unitarianism. Dr. Paterson is thus stating a theory, not reconstructing theology, either here or elsewhere, on his own account, as some vaporeing superficialists have supposed. He has not even made the best of the theory that could have been made: he merely says that "probably some fresh thinking requires to be done in regard to Tritheism." Yes, no doubt, but I take leave to say that there has been some fresh thinking in regard to Tritheism, of which Dr. Paterson is either entirely ignorant, or of which he has not the skill to make any effective use.

Dr. Paterson's treatment of the doctrine of the Person of Christ is rather flimsy, from the scientific point of view. He gives us half-a-dozen pages (pp. 224-230) of general references to historical theology, and discusses the whole modern

aspect in a single page (p. 231) of general and almost valueless character. The kenotic theory, he tells us as something far from new, has "fresh and grave difficulties of its own." W. B. Pope, in his work on the "Person of Christ," said it had a "thousand"! Dr. Paterson thinks the kenotic theory "in its moderate form" the "only possible interpretation" of Christ's Person. It is at least gratifying to find even a "moderate" morsel assimilated by Dr. Paterson's mind, for which he can offer no Confessional sanction and reference, seeing that his extra-confessional development has been so restricted. His method here is a favorite one with him, that, namely, of talking up to and around his subject, and when he reaches the subject itself, he never gets into grips with it at all. How paltry his treatment—it is not to be termed a discussion—must appear to all who, in student days, mastered Bruce's "Humiliation of Christ," and have kept an outlook on the subsequent literature! What is still more extraordinary is, that this is followed by four pages (pp. 232–235) devoted to the strangely irrelevant, and wholly inappropriate, task of showing that the erroneous notions of "popular thinking" about the Trinity and the Person of Christ really don't matter at all, because Christianity is not a mere system of ideas, but an economy of spiritual power. I do not object to what he has said in its "practical" bearings—for his practical divagations are better than his theoretic attempts—but I confidently affirm that no scientific theologian would have introduced such matter, but would have relegated it to apologetics or to practical theology. It is as if one, whose express function it is to show the value of correct theoretical conceptions, should suddenly turn and say, It really does not matter, after all, for our "rule of faith"

is only a "rule of thumb"! It is again the lamentable absence of scientific ideal.

Nothing in Professor Paterson's book is more thoroughly unscientific and unsatisfactory than his treatment of the doctrine of election. The statement of his unprogressive type of Calvinism might have done very well for the time of our grandfathers, or for the time of Toplady, whom he quotes. It is late in the day to have to say that thought has not stood still, outside Dr. Paterson's classroom, since then. Against the argument touching the infringement of human liberty, he says: "The objection is somewhat invalidated by the observation that there is no general agreement as to what is involved in human free-will." What scientific theologian would allow his thought to take such refuge in Coward's castle? What theologian, with any freedom of vision, would play with human responsibility and Divine righteousness by uttering such loose and specious talk as in this and other sentences? The question of free will, as it bears on the needs of the higher life, has a profound bearing on our doctrinal convictions, on our practical initiatives, and, indeed, upon the whole life. With infinitely greater insight has the German philosopher, Windelband, declared that this is no question of the schools, but a question of life. Even in the speculative region, the French philosopher, Fouillée, has so little viewed the question as one to be shirked that he has been able to say that this is not *a* problem, but *the* problem of philosophy. In the sphere where Dr. Paterson shirks it, however, the problem is the unescapable one of human nature. Anything like scientific treatment is impossible where it is vitiated by the mind's subservience to Confessionalism, a subservience industrious and persistent in Dr. Paterson's mentality. It is difficult, when one is witnessing the plausibilities,

balancings, makeshifts, evasions, and compromises, of this theological conjuror, to believe that one is dealing with literature belonging to the year of grace 1912. It does not appear, he says, that, as to the Calvinistic sovereignty, the Reformed Churches greatly "glory in testifying to its truth" — a tribute surely to the good sense of their clergy — but this reactionary author ventures the desperate hazard that it had been better "magnified," and this he does on the most questionable grounds. As if the world had not had enough of the horrible nightmare of bare unrelieved sovereignty! Dr. Paterson closes his election treatment in these terms: "There is some evidence that the path of movement in Reformed Theology will be found to lie, not in the dubious attempt to deny the causality of God in the foreordination of events and in the determination of human destinies" — a "dubious" description of the position of many who reject his Calvinistic theories — "but in the enlistment of the idea of divine sovereignty in the service of the idea of infinite love." "Some" evidence — how much? What a "sleepy hollow" Reformed Theology has been! If there has been anything like "movement," why has Dr. Paterson's unprogressive Calvinism contributed nothing to it? He is not even careful to put his statement of such "movement" in any other than a loose, elliptical form. He never states the real issue in any incisive or courageous form. That issue is just this, that unless the doctrine of election be presented in a thoroughly ethicized form — accordant with the highest ethical reason and sense — it will be scattered to the winds by thoroughgoing ethical thought in our time, no matter what may become of the Westminster or any other Confession. It is the thoroughness of ethical and logical thinking that is required — not evasions and compromises; for it is

God's absolute predestination which is in question, and these compromises can obviously have no admissibility in such a sphere of absoluteness. There is only one way out of the *impasse* — not, as I believe, an impossible one — and that is by correlating and combining, with ethical thoroughness and scientific rigor, the strength of Calvinism with such elements of truth as may be found in its opposing tenet, purging out the while the elements of weakness from them both. That is what any scientific theology would essay to do, and towards that consummation, so devoutly to be wished, Professor Paterson's contribution is *nil*.

It is a service to truth and to theological science to point out, even so briefly, that if dogmatic theology is ever to be rehabilitated in the respect of the modern mind, it will be by some more progressive, more philosophic, and more variedly furnished type of mind, than Professor Paterson's. This is not to say that he has not given us a popular and serviceable book in some respects, wherein his materials have been put together in ways at times able, clear, and effective. But it is to say that the work is, in its doctrinal treatment, most unoriginal; in its method, utterly unscientific; and in its merely regulative, non-foundational scheme, far from thorough, deep, or satisfying. Tried by the canons of scientific theology, the work can only be pronounced a rather dismal failure.