

ARTICLE VII.

"THE AWAKENING OF AMERICAN
PROTESTANTISM."BY JAMES M. GRAY, D.D., DEAN OF THE MOODY BIBLE
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To the *Constructive Quarterly* for March, 1913, Professor Shailer Mathews, Dean of the Divinity School of the University of Chicago, and President of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America, contributed an article on "The Awakening of American Protestantism," which some esteem to be like a demonstration of the climax of apostasy of which the New Testament speaks.¹

I.

He starts with the premise that the Protestant churches of America are facing difficulties without precedent, chiefly from the influx of foreign-born peoples with their religious traditions and institutions from which they are slow to break. In the cities this has caused the abandonment of downtown churches, but in the rural districts there are parallel conditions also explained by the shifting of population. And yet, Protestantism, he assures us, is not in a state of "collapse," it is not "decadent," but "renascent." No statistics are presented to prove it, because of the impossibility to obtain them, but cer-

¹This reply to the Dean of the Divinity School of Chicago University by the Dean of the Moody Bible Institute of Chicago was sent to the *Constructive Quarterly*, but was declined.

tain arguments or illustrations are offered to show the truth of the contention.

1. One of these is "*the rise of the scientific attitude in Biblical study and theological thought*," which means the thinking of the gospel "in the terms of evolution and democracy." This thinking has produced a change so radical, we are told, as to be measured only by the great epoch which marked the fourth century of the Christian era—a date which sober students of the Bible and church history have regarded as marking the rise of the apostasy referred to, in its first organized form. But, judging by what Dr. Mathews says, the epoch we are now entering surpasses that in its progress on the down-grade, for the Nicene Age still held to an "authoritative orthodoxy," while in this any claim of authority, "except as a survival, will have passed." He finds cause for congratulation in that "heresy trials like that of Dr. Briggs will never again shake the Presbyterian body"; that the Methodists of the North will never again depose for his teaching "another Professor Mitchell"; that the words "heretic" and "orthodox" are passing into disuse except as "repartee"; that every Protestant theological seminary, except those "narrowly denominational," teaches the composite nature of the Pentateuch, Isaiah, and the Synoptic Gospels, and that since the death of Dr. William Henry Green, of Princeton, "there has been no worthy champion of anti-criticism in America."

2. A second argument or illustration is the use made by Protestant thinkers "*of the findings of physical and biological science*." Unfortunately there is no unanimity just now as to what these "findings" are. But this difficulty appears to him more imaginary than real, since these "Protestant thinkers," in their eagerness to get away from the cosmogony of the Bible, will follow any leader for a while if only he be headed in that

general direction. So increasing is this "open-mindedness" in American Protestantism that it is now "freed from many of those anxieties which disturbed it a half-century ago when Mr. Ingersoll could be regarded as a veritable Anti-Christ"; so that, if that eloquent infidel were now here, Protestantism and he would be much nearer one another than they were then,—not because of a change in Mr. Ingersoll, but because of the change in Protestantism. In this remark, by the way, there is a predictive element, since it will be recalled that "the veritable Anti-Christ" who is to come, will be so acceptable to the Protestantism of his day as to be worshiped as the very God.

Our author describes the way by which all this is being brought about. "The best theological schools" are doing it, and by the happy plan, not of meeting or answering the problems, but ignoring or "outgrowing" them, which in this case is practically the same. "The new type of theological instruction in pulpit and Sunday-school is steadily shifting interest from metaphysics to psychology"; which means, as is explained, that such themes as Divine sovereignty, human responsibility, innate sin, free grace, and the Nature and Persons of the Godhead are "archaic," inasmuch as progressive Protestantism is more anxious to be scientific than "credally orthodox," though how it can be one without the other is not stated.

3. "*American Protestantism is adjusting itself to the modern world by laying new emphasis upon the social implications of the gospel.*" The note of apostasy here is the reference to the "modern world." Social service in the church is nothing new, as seen in apostolic precedent and precept. But "awakening Protestantism" is going far beyond the apostolic days in this respect. Those days were concerned merely with amelioration, these with preventing the need of it. They urged to charity, these to a transformation of the social order. They

cared for good Samaritans, these for good "policemen." They wanted to save men out of the state into the kingdom of heaven, these to bring the kingdom of heaven into the state. They to rescue people, these to educate them to keep out of danger. They loved in those days, but in these love is more intelligent. They were keen to do good then, but now they know better how to do it. Then they waited for the second coming of Christ, now they attend primaries. "Awakening Protestantism" loves democracy, and has an enthusiasm not for saving individuals but for a saved society. Preaching is affected by it, Sunday-school teaching is affected, our great religious institutions are affected. The one outstanding feature of the "Men and Religion Forward Movement," the author says, was not evangelism, or missions, or Bible study, but economics. Men were not anxious about hell, but social injustice. They did not want "life-lines" thrown out to them, but "a new ship and a new crew and a Captain that knows his course." "Awakening Protestantism" goes into politics, originates vice commissions, coöperates with labor unions, and sends its young men and women to the non-Christian world with "every good thing that Christians enjoy." *Schools, colleges, hospitals, athletics, literature are named,* — why omit salvation?

The program is certainly splendid from the viewpoint of the modern world. No wonder a worldly church is captivated by it. But is there not an ominous sound in the words no more "life-lines," but "a new ship and a new crew and a Captain who knows his course"? "For the time will come when they will not endure the sound teaching; but, having itching ears, will heap to themselves teachers after their own lusts" (2 Tim. iv. 3).

4. A fourth point is *the new regard for religious education,*

of which the graded Sunday-school lesson is an instance, and in which the "Religious Education Association has been a primary agent." Of course no intelligent Christian will fail to welcome the best religious education, or the graded lesson *per se*. But that for which "awakening Protestantism" stands is a peculiar kind of religious education, and a particular system, and a particular treatment of the graded lesson. This last is set forth by a certain syndicate of publishers, and is unscriptural in character and exceedingly harmful in its spiritual results. Representing the radical criticism and a human and faulty authorship of the Sacred Books, it reduces the Word of God to the level of ordinary literature. It substitutes nature lessons for Holy Scripture; it breaks the unity of effort which has been one of the strongest features of the Sunday-school work for forty years, and it slurs over the great essentials of the Christian faith.

To quote the Publicity Committee of the Presbyterian Church in the United States; "We do not find in this treatment any emphasis on such doctrines as the justice of God; the universality, guilt and punishment of sin; the death of Christ as the only hope of salvation; the fact and necessity of regeneration, justification, and progressive sanctification, or the final destiny of the soul as a fixed and eternal state either for blessedness or misery.

"Since then, this Graded course proposes to supply the instruction for all Sabbath school children from the age of four to seventeen, what will be the consequence of its teaching? Evidently the children using it will be given almost no instruction on the fundamental doctrines of Scripture, and will grow up in ignorance of some, if not most, of the truths of the Bible essential to salvation."

As for the Religious Education Association, it has been in-
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deed a primary agent in introducing these lessons to the Sunday schools, and that is the way in which it has become best known. But let it have its unmolested way for another ten years; and, unless God interposes with a gracious and mighty revival, there will be not enough Evangelicalism in American Protestantism to make a protest even as feeble as this.

5. A fifth point is *the rise of a coöperative and federated denominationalism*. So strong and rapid a rise is this as already to have brought together "the conservative and progressive wings of Protestant thought which a few years ago threatened a cross-sectioning of all denominations." In other words, the conservative, or orthodox, wing of Protestant thought is not nearly so conservative to-day as a few years ago. So conservative was it then as to threaten a breach within each denomination; but now it is practically quiescent everywhere, except among the orthodox Lutherans, we are told.

And how strategically was the change brought about! "Instead of seeking after credal uniformity. . . . Protestant bodies have learned the great lesson that the quickest way to get together as individuals is to work together as organized bodies." Outgrowing problems again. And the kind of "organized bodies" thus produced is exemplified in the "Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America," to which our author refers as the greatest outstanding illustration of this new attitude of the mind. And what is the "Federal Council," and what is its latest achievement? The *Methodist Protestant* says, that from the beginning there have been elements in it disposed to make light of fundamentals, and to conciliate Unitarians on the one hand and Romanists on the other. At the last quadrennial meeting the word "Protestant" had to be eliminated from one of its reports, so insistent was the demand; and so many were the phases of thought to be placated,

and so strong was the desire of unity at any price, that "principal became a negligible quantity." But the heaviest charge is that of disloyalty to the Word of God. At a great mass meeting a principal speaker, who was applauded almost from the beginning to the end, relegated the book of Daniel to a place among the myths; and why not, if the president of the council himself finds "difficulty in accepting as strictly historical the accounts of so-called miracles such as walking upon water and turning water into wine"?

To come to the reports or declarations of this gathering, that on "Modern Industry" is purely a social or political doctrine, with nothing in it distinctively Christian; and yet it is put forth as one of its outstanding features. To quote a temperate critic, "The Social Service Commission could unite on the minimum wage and on the abolition of poverty, but they left to the brief closing paragraphs of their report the recognition of the Divine power by which those reforms are to be accomplished, and even that recognition was meagre and scanty. It is of course carefully explained that that power was taken for granted, *but it can not be taken for granted.* The chief business of the Council was to exalt that power. It is also claimed that any discussion of religious truth would have brought out differences of opinion, and that on religion the safe course was silence. If this were true and the churches of Christ must sit silent concerning their Lord and Master and His work for men, The Federal Council is a travesty."

These are the five points of awakening American Protestantism. What do we think of them? We put it to the intelligent Christian—the man who has been born again and who is a student of his Bible, Are they not indicative of the apostasy

of which all the writers of the New Testament speak? For convenience we sum them up:—

1. American Protestantism is progressing toward the goal where any claim of authority will have passed, and where ministers and theological professors may teach what they will, and none shall make them afraid.

2. Psychology has already taken the place of Biblical instruction in our churches and theological schools, and the fundamentals of the faith, including the nature of the Godhead itself, are out of date. There now can be closer fellowship with infidels.

3. Soul-saving is secondary to the transformation of society and the betterment of our physical environment and the purification of politics.

4. Moreover, care is taken that there shall be no rebound from this condition of things, because where the Bible is not removed from the Sunday schools, it is emasculated of its convicting and converting power.

5. Nor need further aid for orthodoxy be expected from any quarter whatsoever, as the federation of the churches has closed up every breach!

II.

The occasion for our reply to this article is in the challenge it contains. "American Protestantism enters this creative epoch in two main divisions," its author says, "the line of cleavage being determined by hostility to or sympathy with the general trend of modern scientific methods or conclusions." He then places on one side "the various Bible Institutes which have grown up in Chicago," and other localities he names, and on the other, "the truly representative Protestantism of America."

Those of us on this side of the chasm are characterized in three ways:—

1. We “are not in sympathy with the general trend of modern scientific methods or conclusions.”

2. We “repudiate all efforts at re-thinking Christian faith, and prefer a bald literalism in the treatment of the Scriptures.”

3. We endeavor “to reproduce the extreme Messianic elements which the primitive church inherited from the apocalyptic literature of Judaism.”

These three reduced to one, and stated in its simplest form, is this: We still believe the Old and New Testaments to be the inspired Word of God, and take them at their face value.

But are we so isolated and unscholarly in this respect as would appear? Does not our critic class the Lutherans with us, and are not they a strong and respectable body? He does the same with the theological seminaries that are “narrowly denominational,” and they are strong and respectable too.

To illustrate: The most prominent feature in American theological circles last year was the centennial celebration of Princeton Seminary. A notable gathering that, including representatives of all the Administration Boards of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, and in mission lands; representatives of foreign theological faculties, and of universities and colleges; the alumni of the Seminary; the presiding officers of all the Evangelical churches in the United States, and of the Presbyterian churches in Great Britain, as well as other distinguished individuals. The opening sermon of the occasion was preached by President Patton on “The Faith which was Once for All Delivered to the Saints,” and was reported as “a magnificent exposition of the position of the Seminary with reference to the theological

tendencies of the day": not only engaging the profound attention of the representative audience, but setting "the celebration at the highest pitch of academic dignity and religious sensibility."

In that sermon, and in that presence, Dr. Patton said that. "the theological position of Princeton Seminary is exactly the same to-day that it was a hundred years ago." "They had put a new interpretation on the "days" in Genesis, and in other respects had used the results of science in the interpretation of the Scriptures. They were in possession of new material for studying the historical problems connected with the origin and growth of Biblical literature. They had a better text of the New Testament and a better understanding of its meaning than were possessed by those to whom the Seminary owed the beginnings of its life. But none of these things made necessary any modification of their belief as to the authority or dogmatic content of the Scriptures. The theology of the Reformers had not been so generally abandoned as some claimed, and if it had been, that would not prove it to be untrue. Certain forms of modern philosophical opinion are incompatible with dogmatic Christianity, but there is no necessity of adopting those forms of philosophical opinion. The Christian consciousness of to-day may give us a new scale of values in regard to the great doctrines of Christianity, but what right has such consciousness to supplement the Scriptures or contradict their obvious meaning? When we impute to Paul a meaning which in all probability never entered his mind, and deny to his words the meaning he evidently intended them to have, we are handling the Word of God deceitfully. There is thus but one honest course to follow, either give up the Scriptures as no longer having authority, or take them at their face value.'

But we need not refer to Dr. Patton further. The Moody Bible Institute may well shield itself behind a school of learning like Princeton Seminary, and until the one falls into the chasm, the other need have no fear.

But a further reference of Dr. Mathews to the Bible Institutes should not pass unnoticed. He thinks their literalism carried to extremes has given rise to such movements as that of Dr. Dowie, the "Holy Rollers," the "Millennial Dawn," the "Church of the Nazarenes," etc., which is rather an "unscientific" statement, to say the least. Bible Institutes of the right sort are the antidote to these extremes, whose real cause is that "awakening Protestantism" of which Dr. Mathews speaks. What the present writer has said in another place concerning Christian Science equally applies here, viz. that the church possesses a remedy which intelligently and faithfully employed would remove the reason or the occasion for these movements. This remedy is suggested in Paul's words to the Colossians, "fully to preach the Word of God" (i. 25). Failing to do this, the church has failed to satisfy the higher aspirations of the soul, which the followers of these erroneous doctrines have seemed to find satisfied in them.

Indeed, Dr. Mathews himself gives justification for saying this, since he admits, in the second part of his article, that the awakening of Protestantism exposes it to peculiar dangers. These he enumerates as:—

1. A negative intellectualism minimizing doctrine and submerging Christian truths in philosophical and general culture.
2. Making the churches mere agents of social service.
3. Too great reliance upon mere machinery.

One would think that a physician able to make so good a diagnosis, would be equally wise in his prescription; but, alas, on the homeopathic principle that like cures like, his recom-

mentation is an increase of the disease. The greatest fear, he says, is the "re-actionary," the panic-stricken minister or theological professor, who, like Luther, may become terrified at the radicalism of his followers, and call a halt before that radicalism has reached a logical conclusion. "If the remedy for the evil of democracy is more democracy, the remedy for the evils of Protestantism is more Protestantism." It is the cry of the French Revolution, as it seems to us. It is the spirit of lawlessness which would do away with the authority of the Bible and ultimately the Christ of the Bible, and substitute in their stead a deified humanity. It is a recurrence to the temptation of Eden, "Ye shall be as God, knowing good and evil."

The concluding sentences of the foregoing paragraph are not mere rhetoric; although they are not intended to apply in any personal sense to the author of "Awakening Protestantism," but rather to "Awakening Protestantism" itself, since what he says of it is true. He is not writing as an advocate so much as an interpreter. It is not what he wants but what he *sees*, of which he speaks; and yet, admittedly, he sympathizes with what he sees. But others see it too, and have spoken and written about it in the same way. Philanthropists and historians, publicists and sociologists, churchmen and agnostics, are all agreed that we are in a state of chaos and transition. And with all of them religion, and especially Christianity, is in the foreground of their thought. "Old creeds have given away"; "unbelief has grown up among us, an unbelief which is kindling the revolution of the twentieth century"; "the controversies of bygone centuries ring with a strange hollowness upon the ear." "A vast social and intellectual transformation," it is called by some; by others, "a confederacy of evil marshaling its hosts from all parts of

the world." Christianity seems to many as "a parenthesis in the world's story, a dream that is passing away."

Nor is it the leaders only who are thinking thus, but the rank and file too. Pulpit, platform, press, the man on the street, all declare that a new age is just upon us. What it is, or what it will be, they do not know, for all is obscurity and confusion, but they believe it is very near.

Thank God for the Bible at such a time as this, and especially for that "more sure word of prophecy," whereunto we do well to "take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise" in our hearts (2 Pet. i. 19).

For the sake of brevity we pass over the Old Testament, but we recall that our Lord teaches in the Gospels that just before he comes again, "many false prophets shall arise, and shall deceive many, and because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold" (Matt. xxiv. 11, 12). And in another place, he asks, "When the Son of man cometh, shall he find the faith on the earth?" with the evident implication that little of it will be discerned (Luke xviii. 8, marg.).

Paul follows in the same line, teaching that there shall come "a falling away" (an apostasy), and that "the man of sin" shall be revealed, "the son of perdition," "the lawless one" (2 Thess. ii. 3-8), whom the consensus of the church has always regarded as the Antichrist. Indeed, this falling away, this denial of the Christian faith, had begun in Paul's own time; and he predicts that "evil men and seducers"—in the visible church, remember,— "shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived," until the end of the present age, when the apostasy will be headed up in the individual of whom he speaks.

John corroborates Paul, affirming that what is so prevalent

to-day — the denial of the Incarnation — is the essential characteristic of the Antichrist. “Every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God; and this is that spirit of Antichrist, whereof ye have heard” (1 John iv. 3).

Peter sustains John, explicitly warning us of the false teachers who will arise, and “bring in damnable heresies,” adding that “many shall follow their pernicious ways, by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of” (2 Peter ii. 2).

Jude speaks in the same manner of “ungodly men,” speaking “evil of those things, which they knew not,” “natural, having not the Spirit”; while the book of Revelation sums up the whole by outlining, in the first three chapters, “the spiritual history of the church from the loss of the first love of Ephesus, to the lukewarmness and self-exaltation of Laodicea.” This last the Lord spues out of his mouth, type of his rejection of the false church and the godless Christianity of the end of these days. The later chapters of Revelation reveal in detail the judgments following upon Christendom when the true church, which is the body of Christ, shall have been caught up to meet him in the air (1 Thess. iv. 16, 17).

Did necessity demand or opportunity permit, we might inquire into the elements or forces working within Christendom to-day to bring about this state of things. We might speak of the prevailing pantheistic philosophy, the whole trend of which is to “undermine faith in a Personal God and in that system of Biblical truth which has the Incarnate Son of God, as its centre, and which is embodied in the creeds of the Church.” We might speak of the tendencies of modern literature, in the essayists, the poets, the novelists, the magazine writers, and newspaper writers, all of which have so little in

common with revealed Christianity. We might speak of the reform movements of the day, especially Socialism, which has "borrowed from Christianity its conception of an earthly kingdom of happiness upon the earth" and would bring it in by legislative enactment.

But why continue? "This is so pessimistic," men say, "we will have none of it." But we reply, "What saith the Scriptures?" It is not a question of the ultimate triumph of the gospel of Jesus Christ, for all power is given unto him in heaven and on earth (Matt. xxviii. 18). It is not a question of the setting up of God's kingdom on this earth, for he has promised it and his promises never fail. But it is a question of the time and the method in which all this shall be brought about. To accommodate a figure of Dr. Arnot, a ship has set sail and kept on her course many days and nights, with no other incidents than those which are common to all. Suddenly land appears. It is one of the coral islands encircled by a ring of fearful breakers at some little distance from the shore. Forward the ship must go. The waves are higher and angrier than any that have been seen before. Partly through them, and partly over them, she is borne at a bound. Strained, and giddy, and almost senseless, the passengers find themselves within that sentinel of crested waves that guard the shore, while the portion of the sea that lies before them seems like a lake of Paradise, so calm and clear it is.

Christianity is such a ship and through these long centuries has kept upon her course. But the end of the age is near, and trying experiences are just ahead. "The sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of heaven shall be shaken" (Luke xxi. 25). In other words, the depths of human wickedness have not yet

been fathomed. Hostility to our God and to his Christ shall yet take other forms. The pride and lawlessness of man shall yet be culminated in one who will show himself that he is God. The awakening of American Protestantism points the way of the development of this man of sin. But beyond is peace. "He shall be broken without hand," as Daniel says. The Lord shall consume him "with the spirit of his mouth," and shall destroy him "with the brightness of his coming" is the echo of the Apostle Paul. "And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low; and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day" (Isa. ii. 17).

It will be the old ship, with possibly something of a new crew, but it will be seen that the Captain knew his course.