

THE DEEP GULF BETWEEN THE OLD  
THEOLOGY AND THE NEW.

A LAST CONFESSION OF FAITH.

I.

THE more my earthly life declines, the more do I feel myself compelled to concentrate my strength and time on practical aims: even in the purely scientific work which falls to me in my calling as a representative of biblical science, it is a practical end which I keep in view. It has been my privilege to live contemporaneous with a bright period of reawakening in Christian faith and life, which has borne fruit in a splendid rejuvenescence of Church theology; and now I have been reserved with a few, to witness with them how the structure of half-a-century is being rent, and how what hitherto stood firm, and seemed likely to endure, is being undermined and overthrown. This must not astonish us overmuch. Such is the course of history, sacred and profane. After the wave-mountain comes the wave-valley; and when anything new is to be created, the form of primordial chaos repeats itself. Heaven and earth are fleeting, for they shall pass away; but they are also enduring, for they shall come forth from that passing away as new heaven and new earth. The Church's *credo* is changeable, for the knowledge which is therein expressed has from time to time a smelting to undergo; but it is also unchangeable, for in it is a truth which outlives the fire, and which, through all changes of man's cognition, reveals itself anew in ever purer and intenser brilliance. For just this reason however has the Church to depend for her maintenance and progress on the fulfilment of this condition, that she make herself mistress of the elements of truth implied in the destruction of what has hitherto been accepted, and that she melt them down with the truth

sealed to her by a higher than scientific authority. This is the practical problem towards the solution of which I would gladly lend my aid.

For thankful recognition such endeavour must look to comparatively few among contemporaries, because the majority of Christian believers will regard as invalid, or certainly as doubtful, the supposition from which it starts; though now-a-days scarcely any one questions that even the flood of rationalism from which the Church emerged victorious, left her fertilized by a sediment of knowledge. That, by such endeavour, one should earn but paltry thanks in the camp of his opponents, lies in the nature of the case. If we seek to unite what in the accepted views of modern criticism, appears to demand recognition, with that which is inalienable in our faith, we incur the reproach of an inconsistency which stops halfway, and are likely to bear the ridicule cast upon old clothes adorned with new patches. But this should not deter nor astonish us. Not deter: for when we consider how Semler's rationalism and Schleiermacher's entire reconstruction of theology have contributed to the advance of Church theology, we may find therein a guarantee that the latter will also be able gradually to assimilate the elements of truth contained in the present chaos. And it should not astonish us that those on the other side look down on us in their superiority. No process of assimilation will bring us materially nearer each other, for between old and new theology lies a deep gulf, which the former must cross to win the thanks of the latter; and this it cannot do, without approaching that sin for which there is no forgiveness in this world or the next.

## II.

There is a unifying tendency native to the soul of man, by which his thought, speech, and effort after knowledge

are decided. Thinking or speaking, he arranges things in the world of phenomena according to common features, by which he classes them together under the abstract unities of notions. In his effort after knowledge he seeks for thesis and antithesis, and synthesis, which is the blending of the proposition and its opposite in a real and higher unity. Or, again, he seeks to force his way down to the radical unity, whence contraries branch out and develop. This monistic tendency is in its final ground and purpose a tendency toward God, the alone One. Since however things which have their common origin in God may be in themselves dualistically severed and in principle distinct, the monistic tendency oversteps the line drawn for it when it reduces antitheses that defy unification to different sides or degrees of an imagined unity. Thus God and world are antitheses which must stand; he who annuls the opposition asserts either, There is no world different from God, or, There is no God different from the world. Spirit and body are antitheses, which must likewise remain unreduced; otherwise spirit is identified with matter itself, developed from below upward to self-consciousness. Man is a duality of spirit and body, and as such is different in species from the beast; he who annuls this dualism of the human substance places man on a level with the highly developed beast.

In such fundamental contraposition stands also nature and grace. The nature of a thing is its constitution as fixed by creation and enduring by law; the nature of a man is his essential condition, created or inborn, and expressing itself in this way or that by morally responsible activity. Man's nature was originally good, but is now, through his wilful alienation from God, become sinful, fallen into the service of sin. But it is God's merciful will to free man from the self-corruption of his nature. He has appointed Christ, the Son of God and man, to mediate in

the restoration of our communion with God ; and grace is the name of God's action for us and to us, the purpose of which is to free us from the consciousness of guilt and from the ban of sin-service. The work of God's grace in Christ, aiming as it does at our deliverance, at the breaking of our bonds, at our salvation, is a supernatural work ; and he who submits himself to this can in his own experience distinguish the supernatural workings of grace from the workings of his natural powers and impulses. It is a very important matter, says Philip Jacob Spener, in beginning his treatise on Nature and Grace (1687), which he as chief court preacher in Dresden dedicated to the clergy of Saxony,—it is a very important matter, to which much pertains for the exercise of true Christianity and the knowledge of our state, that we should know well how to distinguish what is nature from what is grace. And an appendix to this work, taken from Thomas à Kempis, begins : “ Son, thou must diligently apprehend the motions of nature and grace, for they move themselves contrary, and scarce are they distinguished unless by a spiritual and inwardly enlightened man.” In fact, without these antitheses there is no Christian life, and without the distinction of these antitheses there is no Christian self-knowledge. Nature and grace are as rootedly, as essentially antithetical as world and God. But it is a fundamental characteristic of the new theology that it so softens down the sharpness of these antitheses as to make the distinction vanish. Whether it admits the fact or not, the case actually stands thus : it alters the essence of grace, and makes everything nature. This is the deep gulf which parts the old from the new theology, and makes intercourse impossible.

The Christian, as such, leads, as Paul depicts in the seventh and eighth chapters of the Epistle to the Romans, a dual life, in which he feels himself on the one side in servitude and misery, on the other free and blessed. The

carnal life, in which is rooted his natural existence, still continues, and never ceases to throw evil shadows on his spiritual life; while this spiritual life is a planting of grace, which has removed him from the law of nature, and set him in a sphere of life exalted above it, and is thus a working of God *supra naturam* because *contra naturam*. For, as the apostle says in chap. viii. 2, "The law of the Spirit, which quickens us in Christ Jesus, hath made me free from the law of sin and death." "I live," he can say in Galatians ii. 20; "yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." The division between nature and grace reaches thus to the centre of his being. His natural I is enthralled under the curse of the law; but Christ is his righteousness, in Him he has obtained a new I, which knows itself as free from the law and just before God. No one has more profoundly grasped this truth, or more powerfully attested it, than Luther in his memorable exposition of the Epistle to the Galatians. There is, he there affirms, a righteousness which belongs to the earthly, and a righteousness which belongs to the heavenly world; a righteousness of the law, which is an affair of earth and of our own action, and a righteousness which we, without our action, must receive from heaven, the righteousness of Christ, which is ours when we become by faith so united to Him, that He takes upon Himself everything condemnable that attaches to us, and in place thereof gives us Himself with His righteousness, His victory, and His life as our own. Thus grace works into the natural life of man a new supernatural life, which differs from the former as essentially as the future world of glory from the present world of birth and decay.

### III.

Or are those extravagances which lift Christian experience beyond the realm of actuality into that of the

imaginary? The new theology must pronounce such a judgment. We however rule it to be incompetent, seeing that it starts from preconceptions which render it incapable of experiences such as those of a Paul or a Luther. A theologian who denies that sinfulness is the inheritance of man from his birth, that man by nature is a child of wrath, and has to confess himself a sinner worthy of condemnation; who denies that Christ by substitutionary work and suffering has satisfied the righteousness or the wrath of God, and made for the love of God an open path; who denies that we can enter into a direct real relation of communion with God and the risen Christ, —such a theologian has by these preconceptions rendered himself from the outset unable to experience and personally to test the work of grace in his soul.

But these assertions—it will be objected—are in truth no preconceptions. On the contrary, they are conclusions based on observation of our religious life and experience. So then experience stands opposed to experience. In our opinion, that is only a very superficial introspection which fails to see that our inborn nature is one sundered from God and penetrated to its most secret folds with defects and sinful impulses; so that we must accuse ourselves before a holy God as having earned His punishment in time and eternity, and praise with thankfulness that decree of Divine love, which appointed Christ to work out for us by His crucifixion and ascension the forgiveness of sins and a new beginning of life, and which thus made it possible for sinners worthy of condemnation to become by faith the beloved of God. With regard to the real personal intercourse with the living God and the revealed Son of God and man, the new dogmatic school views this as a mystic illusion opposed to experience; while in its place it puts a mediate relationship effected through the Christian community, and through what God in Christ has become to this community. This

is in opposition to the promise of the Lord, "He who loveth Me will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and dwell with him" (John xiv. 23); in opposition to the testimony of believers of the new covenant since the time of the apostles; in opposition also to psalmists and prophets. It is not in agreement with historical Christianity to refer redemption and salvation directly to the community and only indirectly to the individual. The relations are ever found to be reversed. It is individuals who, with a sense of merited condemnation, desire to be made whole, and who grasp with faith the offered grace of God in Christ, that form the community of the saved—the unseen beginning of a kingdom of God, of a commonwealth, that is, heavenly in origin and nature, whose essence is living communion with God in Christ, and which starts from this centre in its work of subduing the world and moulding earth after the likeness of heaven.

There is no biblical conception which, as treated by this new theology, does not lose in depth and in fulness of contents. True, the kingdom of God is explained to be supernatural and supramundane: but only supernatural in so far as it surpasses the natural forms of society (marriage, social and national relationship); and only supramundane in so far as it has for its bond of union the working of the invisible motive love. So far correct: but the supernatural and the supramundane character of the kingdom of God consists above all in this, that its foundation in the human soul is a work of supernatural and supramundane influence; a work of God according to the overflowing riches of His grace in Christ Jesus, as the Lord Himself said, "The kingdom of God is within you"; and as His apostle said, "The kingdom of God is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost."

He who, in the midst of his estrangement from God and degradation in sin, has experienced this spiritual trans-

formation knows that he owes it to the supernatural interference of the rescuing hand of God, and feels himself placed in a new world, in contrast with which his earlier existence appears like the groping of a blind man or the lethargy of one more dead than alive. This new birth, which is accomplished within the realm of Divine grace by way of repentance and faith, together with the workings of grace by which it is brought to pass and maintained, does not in the new theology receive its due. Even as the closest living union with God and the risen Saviour is rejected as mystical, this process of conversion is considered pietistic. Though I differed on many points with the late Ferdinand Walther, together with whom I passed through the throes and raptures of the new spiritual birth, on one point we remained ever agreed—that the condition of the true Christian is a supernatural one, seeing that it has its root in the new birth which he has experienced. This condition is wanting in the new theology. Apart from its rejection of the so-called metaphysical element, to which it denies any practical significance, the new school speaks with regard to the actual facts of experience a language of moral shallowness foreign to the Christian and the theologian of the old stock. The difference between nature and grace is here toned down and washed out, and that makes the deep gulf which divides us.

#### IV.

That the Christianity of the new theology is not that recorded in history is further evident from this, that in identifying grace with nature, it at the same time denies the reality of miracles. For miracle has grace as its ground, purpose, and province. The supernatural influences of God on man, which produce in him the new spiritual life, issue from the decree of grace which aims at man's salvation; and the supernatural interference of God



in external events only subserves the realization of this decree. Between those redemptive operations of grace and these historical miracles lie the miraculous gifts of the Spirit, especially the gift of prophecy, which lifts the receiver above the restrictions of nature. In every such gift is manifest the free activity of God, which breaks through the natural chain of causation to fulfil moral purposes connected with the decree of His saving grace. The new theology however recognises no interruption of the course of natural law, under a Divine direction independent of nature. It reduces the miracle to nature; more specially to a natural phenomenon, with which, according to the usual definition, there is connected the experience of a particularly helpful providence. This is not a different gulf from that already mentioned; but how deep the gulf is, we now rightly apprehend for the first time!

For here it is plain, that the difference between old and new theology coincides at bottom with the difference between the two conceptions of the world, which are at present more harshly opposed than ever before. The modern view of the world declares the miracle to be unthinkable, and thus excluded from the historical mode of treatment; for there is only the one world-system, that of natural law, with whose permanence the direct, extraordinary interferences of God are irreconcilable. The opposite view, on the other hand, does not content itself with regarding the miracle as possible; it regards this as absolutely necessary, for it distinguishes two world-systems, that of natural law and that of morals, both of which, since there are men and so history, act and react on one another; inasmuch as the relation of God to free beings brings this in its train, that interferences take place in the course of nature which make it subserve moral ends. This is the Christian, the biblical, and, as we may venture to assert, the religious conception of the world, for it is the presup-

position of all historical religions : whereas the other view is a doctrine of philosophy and natural science, which would fain be recognised as a practical religion, but which never will, inasmuch as it surrenders inalienable ground-principles of religion in denying living intercourse with the Godhead, and, in order to hold intact the inviolability of the chain of causation found in natural law, is compelled to abandon the freedom both of man and of God.

The restricting of God to the course of nature has for its result that we must deny to all prayer, alike of entreaty and intercession, any effect on external events mediated by response to prayer. Heinrich Lang, in a work with the title, *Religion in the Time of Darwin* (1874), handles this subject in a way to make one shudder, when he quotes Psalm xci., and then says, that the comfort of this psalm is due to a way of thinking which has been discredited ; that no prayer or blessing which accompanies the son on his way to battle can avail to check or turn aside the fatal ball. As if there were not accredited answers to prayer, like the intercession of Luther for Melanchthon and Myconius ! And as if each faithful petitioner could not, from his own experience, substantiate the psalmist's words (lxvi. 3), "Thou hearest prayer, therefore cometh all flesh to Thee" ! All flesh—for everywhere in the world of men where prayer is offered, this is done in the certainty that prayer has effect on God and can call forth active help in return. There is more reason in the *consensus gentium* than in the doctrines of isolated thinkers, even be they so great as Schleiermacher and Ritschl. We can refute the testimony of the soul on paper, but it is impossible permanently to suppress its reaction in our inmost nature.

#### V.

But not alone do the life of prayer and, in general, the religious life receive from this restricting of God to the

course of nature a character different from that hitherto found among men. Even faith in the Easter message begins to waver. Our greeting on Easter Day loses heart. The "He is risen!" which rings through the New Testament like the blast of the trumpet of victory, becomes less probable than the allegation of the Jews, "His disciples stole Him." For if God cannot make the course of nature subservient to higher ends, and, as a creator, in special circumstances interfere with the created order of nature, then is the re-awakening of Christ no historical fact; His work lacks the Divine seal; and Paul himself says, in 1 Corinthians xv. 4, that if the resurrection falls, Christianity ceases to exist as a religion of redemption, and can no more deliver the human consciousness and life from the ban of sin and death. The disciples of the new theology recognise the resurrection as a fact in the consciousness of the early Church, but towards it as a fact of history they remain cold and reserved. In their system, this is not the centre, but merely a dim point in the periphery. Logical consistency on their part would cause it to vanish altogether.

With melancholy frankness did Alexander Schweizer, who died on the third of July last, put this question in a kindly notice of my *Apologetics* which appeared in the *Protestantische Kirchenzeitung* for 1862: "Are we then, by assuming this one event, to abandon the entire modern view of the world?" And Heinrich Lang in the *Zeitstimmen* for 1861, confessed honourably: "So soon as I can convince myself of the reality of the resurrection of Christ, this absolute miracle, as Paul seems to declare it, I shatter the modern conception of the world. This breach in the order of nature, which I regard as inviolable, would be an irreparable breach in my system, in my whole world of thought." In fact, he who in principle rejects the miracle must also reject the historical nature of the resurrection of Christ; but he who acknowledges as history this one

miracle will also find it not improbable that this is the conclusion of miraculous premisses and brings miraculous results in its train. The decree of grace which attains in the resurrection of Christ the centre and summit of its realization fulfils itself in miracles. In most cases, indeed, is the government of God like the waters of Siloah, that go softly; the visible miracles of history are only those flashes from the supernatural activity of God which serve rare and exceptional ends. But the whole work of grace, whether in the experience of individuals or in the history of mankind, even where it is hidden, is supernatural and therefore miraculous; because, in the midst of this world lying under the law of sin and death, it aims at establishing a world of righteousness and glory.

## VI.

When the one conception of the world is thus presented from the standpoint of the other, the mode of statement unavoidably partakes of the nature of a polemic. The special purpose however with which I entered on my subject was not polemical. I wished to exhibit as objectively as possible the deep gap which divides the theologians of to-day, especially the thoughtful minds who have come into contact with philosophy and natural science, into two camps. An accommodation of this antagonism is impossible. We must belong to the one camp or the other. We may, it is true, inside the negative camp, tone down our negation to the very border of affirmation, and, inside the positive camp, we may weaken our affirmation so as almost to change it to negation: the representation by individuals of the one standpoint or the other leaves room for a multitude of gradations and shades. But to the fundamental question. Is there a supernatural realm of grace, and within it a miraculous interference of God in the world of nature, an interference displaying itself most centrally and decisively

in the raising of the Redeemer from the dead?—to this fundamental question, however we may seek to evade it, the answer can only be yes or no. The deep gulf remains; it will remain to the end of time. No effort of thought can fill it up. There is no synthesis to bridge this thesis and antithesis. Never shall we be able, by means of reason's evidence or the witness of history, to convince those who reject this truth. But this do we claim for ourselves, that prophets and apostles and the Lord Himself stand upon our side; this we claim, that while the others use the treasures of God's word eclectically, we take our stand upon the whole, undivided truth.

True, there is a zone to a certain extent neutral, that, namely, of historico-critical and particularly of literary-critical investigation; but here also the distinction of standpoint manifests itself in estimating tradition, weighing evidences, and measuring degrees of certainty. And it is a most disheartening sign of the times, that even such as in theory acknowledge the miracle, in practice really reckon on naturalistic assumptions. The *theologia gloriae*, which prides itself on being its own highest authority, bewitches even those who appeared proof against its enchantments; and the *theologia crucis*, which holds Divine folly to be wiser than men, is regarded as an unscientific lagging behind the steps of progress. But the subjectivity of science finds a wholesome check in the office of preacher and guardian of souls. Only those of little faith can fancy that such science as this, which, with its fruitless knowledge and washed out *credo*, must be dumb beside the bed of death, menaces the existence of the Church. In the Muldenthal I was, as a young man, a witness of soul-struggles and spiritual victories, which rendered distasteful to me for ever the over-estimation of science. Still does my spiritual life find its root in the miraculous soil of that first love which I experienced with Lehmann, Zöppfel, Ferdinand Walther,

and Bürger; still to me is the reality of miracles sealed by the miracles of grace which I saw with my own eyes in the congregations of this blessed valley. And the faith which I professed in my first sermons, which I could maintain in Niederfrohna and Lunzenau, remains mine to-day, undiminished in strength, and immeasurably higher than all earthly knowledge. Even if in many biblical questions I have to oppose the traditional opinion, certainly my opposition remains on this side of the gulf, on the side of the theology of the Cross, of grace, of miracles, in harmony with the good confession of our Lutheran Church. By this banner let us stand; folding ourselves in it, let us die.

FRANZ DELITZSCH.

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PROFESSOR CHEYNE.

THE writer of this brief article must at the outset distinctly disclaim all title to criticise Dr. Cheyne's books, and he has not sought to inform himself of any facts in his life that are not matter of common knowledge. His object is simply to illustrate the nature of Professor Cheyne's work for sound biblical study in this generation by a sketch of the attitude which the Church of England, as represented by her authorized teachers, has assumed towards the question of inspiration and the criticism of the Old Testament. The statement is intended to be purely historical.

The importance and significance of German criticism was first clearly recognised in the Church of England by Hugh James Rose, whom Dean Burgon has described as "the Restorer of the Old Path." Rose, after spending some time in Germany, in 1824, returned home alarmed and shocked. In May, 1825, he was select preacher at Cambridge, and