

*DOGOMATIC THEOLOGY.*¹

DOGOMATIC is that branch of theological science in which Christian doctrine is defined, interpreted, and presented in a systematic form. It is taken for granted that there is such a thing as Christian doctrine, and that it is capable of scientific treatment. There is truth given in the Christian religion, to the experience of the Christian, which, simply because it is true, can be thought out in itself, and in relation to everything else that we know. I do not mean that it is possible for the Christian theologian, or for any other man, actually to co-ordinate the contents of his mind, so that there shall be no loose ends in it at all, no facts guaranteed by their own evidence, yet wanting in connexion with each other, or apparently opposed; but only that in Christianity the mind of man is put in contact with realities which attest themselves to it *as* real, and which it is bound to interpret, to the best of its ability, in consistency with each other, and with all that it knows.

Stated thus, the task of Dogmatic Theology is no doubt extremely difficult as well as extremely comprehensive, and perhaps it is no wonder that attempts have been made to discharge it on easier terms.

On the one hand, Dogmatic has been reduced to a merely historical science. The word *δόγμα*, from which the name is derived, had among other meanings that of a decree, or legal ordinance. The decree of Augustus Cæsar that all the world should be taxed was a *δόγμα*. The prescriptions of the Jewish law which oppressed the conscience were *δόγματα*. It is in this sense, it has been argued, that we can speak of dogmas in the Christian religion. They are

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those propositions which by some formal act of the Church have obtained a legal authority in it. It is the legal authority, and nothing else, which constitutes them dogmas; and dogmatic can only be the science which treats of these legally authoritative propositions in their legal character. It might be a mistake to say that such a science was easy, but it is at least comparatively easy. Even to investigate these legal dogmas historically, to trace their origin, to show the philosophical or other influences which determined their form, to elicit the Christian interest which they were intended or believed to safeguard, may be comparatively easy. But essential as such a science is, it is only auxiliary to a proper dogmatic. Dogmatic does nothing effective if it does not present in scientific form *the truth of Christianity*—a truth which may have attained more or less adequate embodiment in a succession of legal dogmas, but which must, like all truth, have an authority in it higher than any that law can bestow, and making it independent of any legal warrant.

On the other hand, dogmatic has been reduced to a purely philosophical or speculative science. The Greek *δόγμα* was a term not only of the legislature but of the schools. The dogma of Plato or of the Stoics was the whole mode of thinking which had won acceptance among the disciples of Plato or of Zeno. Its authority was not legal, but inherent; its necessary truth, or what seemed such, imposed itself upon open minds. In a similar sense, the dogma of the Christians was spoken of as the whole mode of thinking which prevailed in the Church. But this arose from assimilation of the Church to a philosophical school—from an abstract conception of Christianity which did great injustice to the reality as it existed in the world; and the type of dogmatic which is based upon it is necessarily guilty of the same injustice. It assumes that Christianity is a body of opinions, or a mode of thought, to

which one might have access in the same way as to Platonism or Stoicism ; that one may be indifferently, so to speak, an Academic or a Stoic or a Christian. But no one who knows what Christianity is could assent to such an idea.

Both these types of dogmatic—the purely historical and the purely speculative—have to be appreciated for what they are worth.

With the first we say, Christianity *is* historical ; but it is a historical *religion*. No series of legal enactments constitutes or explains a religion. We must get behind them all to the convictions which generated them, and to the experience which generated these convictions. When we do, we find ourselves face to face with a historical fact—the presence of Jesus Christ upon the earth. Yet if this historical fact had been merely historical, it is evident that the Christian religion would never have come into being. The first Christians were persons who discovered or had revealed to them in the presence of Jesus Christ upon the earth something more than historical, something eternal and divine. All men did not make this discovery ; but some did. It remained hidden from Caiaphas and Pilate ; it was disclosed to Peter and John. That power or virtue of the soul which grasps the divine in the historical, and so brings true religion to the birth, is faith. It is not necessary at this point to investigate further the nature or the origin of faith ; but we must remember that without it there is no Christianity, and no subject for Christian theology. Unless we have renewed the experience of the first Christians—unless in the exercise of faith we have come into contact, in Christ Jesus, with divine eternal truth—all that is called Christian doctrine must remain unreal to us. We do not know on what it rests ; we cannot see what it is about.

Again, to those who argue for a purely speculative dogmatic, we must say, Christianity is no doubt truth, but it

is historical in the first instance ; and it must always seek its norm in its historical original. The claim to construct a purely speculative dogmatic inevitably ends in the setting up of some temporary philosophy as the measure of Christianity. It may be as meagre as the deism of last century ; it may be as imposing as the grandiose speculations of Hegel ; but it is not historical, and in point of fact, it is always poorer than history. Sometimes it presents itself as a legitimate and even a laudable effort " to rationalize the basis of religion " ; but if you enquire what these words mean, you will find that they mean presenting a basis for religion with which Jesus Christ has nothing particular to do. They mean really that history is something of which God can make no use in entering into communion with man. But the assumption with which we start is that the basis of religion is not made by the theologian, it is given by God in Jesus Christ. We cannot admit that it may be defined beforehand in independence of Him. It may be rationalized only in the sense that when once it has been apprehended by the believing soul it becomes his task to set it in relation to the whole contents of his mind ; not in the sense that other experiences are to impose their own limitations upon it. The apprehension of it is conditioned by faith ; but it is not made dubious on that account. On the contrary, the certainty of faith that in Jesus Christ the historical and the eternal are united, and the very truth of God put within the reach of men dwelling on the earth, is the fundamental and specifically Christian experience, without which neither Christian religion nor Christian theology can exist. But the fulness of eternal truth is only given to faith historically, and we must always revert to what we have in Christ as the measure for rationalized religion.

What has just been said serves to give at least a preliminary idea of dogmatic. It is not a historical science, neither is it a philosophical one, though it is indebted both

to history and philosophy; it is the science of Christian faith—an experience which fills history—and in faith alone do we have experience of the realities which it is the function of dogmatic to interpret, and to present in systematic and intelligible form.

One result of this is, that a true dogmatic must have something personal in it. The truths which it presents are truths of religion, and there is no possibility of presenting them as truths except through and to a mind which is open to religious impression. A system of dogmatic is no doubt one thing, and a personal confession of faith another; but no dogmatic is worth reading or worth thinking about in which one cannot feel at all the critical places the pulse of vital religion. When we become legal or scholastic, anti-quarian or merely speculative, we have lost our way.

But though faith has something personal in it, which must penetrate and vivify dogmatic if it is to be true to its object, it is not on that account private or individualistic. Christian faith from the very first has founded a fellowship. It has been a common faith, and has united men in common experiences. The truth which is revealed in it to the individual is truth which is the common possession of the Church, and the testimony of the Church to the common faith is one of the most important evidences to which the dogmatic theologian appeals.

The expression of the common faith of Christians is to be sought in very various sources. Some are liturgical: there are hymns and prayers in which believing men have given united utterance to their Christian convictions, desires, and hopes. Some are experimental, in a narrower sense. A book like Augustine's *Confessions*, for instance, which has asserted its power over consciences for many centuries, is an authority for Christian faith—its presuppositions, its contents, its consequences—ininitely more valuable than many technical books of theology. The same might be said of

Bunyan's *Grace Abounding*, and in another way of Pascal's *Thoughts*. Not that these are primary sources for dogmatic theology; but they are witnesses to the common faith, and the incomparable energy with which it speaks through them may open the eyes of the theologian to what he would otherwise have missed, and reassure him of what might otherwise have seemed doubtful. The *legal* expressions of the Church's faith, which are to be found in formal creeds or confessions, are of a different character. They cannot be understood until we understand their history, and see the influences which determined the balance of their parts, and the intellectual implements, if one may so speak, which were available for their construction. It is a mistake to lift them out of their historical place, and invest them with a permanent statutory authority. They tell us what the Church, or some great section of the Church, had construed out of its faith at a given stage in the history of the human mind; but there can be no finality in such constructions. They have an authority, indeed, but it is educational, not absolute. They are imposed upon us, in a sense, the moment we are born, and quite apart from our will, for they shape the mind of the Christian community through which Christian faith is mediated to us; but the intent of the community, even in the use it makes of them, is to bring men to maturity, to make them capable of independent appreciation, and therefore of criticism. Hence the creeds and confessions are sources, but not laws, for dogmatic theology. Faith comes to us, no doubt, as an inheritance, yet it is a new birth in every man; and he who lives by faith does not live under law. Sympathetic faith will find in the confession under which it has been nurtured a weighty testimony to the essential truths of the Christian religion; yet it may find also, and may with all loyalty to the Church say that it has found, inconsistent or unchristian elements inadvertently bound up with these, or

positions laid down as essential to Christianity which wider experience or more matured reflection show to be really indifferent. No one has more need than the dogmatic theologian to cultivate the spirit which is appreciative equally of what has been and of what is yet to be. One sometimes meets a preacher who lives under an intense impression that he has discovered the Christian religion. Perhaps he has ; perhaps he never knew anything about it before. But if that is so, it is safe to say that he knows very little about it yet. He has made a very unfortunate discovery if it is one that alienates him from the great past of Christianity, and makes him unable to see the presence of Christ in it, or to appreciate its faith, or to elicit its testimony to the truth. One can hardly tell whether bondage to the past is not to be preferred to this ; whether it is not better to be the servile heir of all the ages, than the most emancipated disinherited man. But however that may be, the dogmatic temper must be equally remote from both extremes. It must be the temper of a man who belongs to his own time, who is sensitive to all the intellectual influences which breathe around him, but who is at the same time, in virtue of his Christian faith, quickly and keenly sympathetic with all that is Christian in the past, and especially with all endeavours to work out the contents of faith into some kind of Christian science.

Behind all other sources for dogmatic theology there stands, of course, Holy Scripture. In one sense Scripture, or let us say for the moment the New Testament, may be regarded as the earliest Christian confession. Every word in it was written by believing men ; it was written out of their faith ; it is the ultimate because the original testimony to what faith is. It shows us what the first believers had in Christ, with what realities faith filled their minds, in what world of truth it enabled them to live. That such a document is in some peculiar sense authoritative will be

apparent at a glance. But two remarks must be made here, to remove possible misunderstandings. The first is, that even the New Testament is not a *legal* authority for the dogmatic theologian. He does not find the material he is to use lying in it ready to his hand, and only waiting to be lifted. Even if the material is there, as undoubtedly and substantially it is, it is not there in the form which is appropriate to his purpose. It is not there as part of the system into which he is elaborating the contents of faith; and though every part of that system has to be vindicated by having its connexion with Scripture, as the primary witness to the faith, made good, no part of it—if for no other reason than that it *is* part of a system—can be vindicated simply by appeal to the Scripture text. The essential content of faith must certainly be discoverable in Scripture if our faith is to answer to historical Christianity; but the parts of a dogmatic system neither can be nor need to be demonstrated from Scripture in detail. Their true proof is that they are integral parts of a whole, the generative principle of which is the same faith which the New Testament exhibits. The other remark I wish to make is this, that the authority of the New Testament for the dogmatic theologian depends on its being an authentic testimony to the faith of the primitive Church. In other words, it depends upon its Apostolic character; and it is to the Apostolic writings that, as a theologian, I go back. It is fashionable at the present moment to speak of going back to Christ, and of finding in His *ipsissima verba*, or, as it has been otherwise expressed, in His consciousness, the measure and the test of the truth with which theology has to deal. There has been much earnest pleading for this point of view, not to mention a considerable amount of cheap rhetoric, about the absurdity of postponing the master to the disciples; but I am convinced that it rests upon a profound misapprehension. Dogmatic theology is

the science of Christian faith—the science which draws out, interprets, and develops the truth with which the believing mind comes into contact in Jesus Christ. The view just referred to, according to which the words of Jesus become a legal standard by which to test (and usually to discredit) the words of the Apostles, means in the last resort that Jesus was the first and the only perfect Christian, the Apostles being Christians of a later, more limited, and more perplexed type. But surely it is far truer to say that Jesus was not a Christian at all in the sense in which we are, and that the typical Christian is the Apostle, not the Master. The specifically Christian consciousness which has to be scientifically developed by the theologian is not the consciousness of Jesus, it is the consciousness of reconciliation to God through Jesus. It is not the consciousness of the Saviour, but the consciousness of the saved, and the confession of it is not the confession of the Lord, but of the Church. I cannot understand how any one should imagine that this is disparaging to Christ. I am confident it is the only manner of proceeding which gives Christ His glory. It is the only one which secures Him in His place as the object of faith, one with the Church, no doubt, as its head, but as its Redeemer, in a place of dignity which no one can share. To appeal to Jesus against the Apostles is injurious both to Him and them. It is injurious to Him, for it practically disregards the promises which He made to the Apostles as He was leaving them, promises which He surely fulfilled. On the one hand, there was a promise of increased spiritual power: “He that believeth on Me, the works that I do shall he do also, and greater works than these shall he do, because I go to the Father.” On the other, there was a promise of increased spiritual illumination: “I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now: howbeit, when He, the Spirit of Truth, is come, He shall guide you

into all the truth." Nothing, we might think, could be more paradoxical, or even more preposterous; but it is a paradox for both parts of which we have Christ's express word, that after His departure the Apostles would wield greater spiritual forces than He had had at His disposal while on earth, and that they would be in a position to preach the Gospel with a fulness and completeness that had been impracticable for Him. Yet these amazing results of His departure were *His* doing; it was *His* Spirit which clothed the Apostles with power, and interpreted to them the reconciling love of God in the cross; and instead of regarding Jesus and the Apostles as teachers of Christianity who are relatively independent of each other, we must rather regard the Apostolic testimony to the Lord as His final testimony to Himself. It is His glory, as He Himself declares; and to appeal from it to His words, the words He spoke on earth, is in principle to forget His glory, to forget that He is the Lord and Giver of the Spirit, to forget His exaltation, to regard Him as a historical Teacher of religion, instead of as the living Head of the Church, the present, the eternal, King of Grace. And as it is injurious to Christ, so is it to the Apostles. In principle it charges them with bearing a testimony to Christ which Christ is compelled to decline. Yet it is to them we owe everything we know of Christ. The contents of the Gospels were part of their testimony to Him. It is another part, not inconsistent with this, at least to *their* consciousness, that we find in what we call their own independent writings; and it is in these writings that what is fundamentally and characteristically Christian first stands out in perfect clearness—the consciousness of reconciliation to God through the atoning death of Jesus and His gift of the Holy Ghost. There is *no* Christian faith known to the New Testament, there is none, I venture to say, known to the Christian Church, at any period of its

history, which does not rest on this. But if this be so (as it is), and if it be in accordance with Christ's promise (as it is), then there is no call to make a schism in the New Testament, nor to seek in the words of Jesus a higher authority for Christian theology than we have in the testimony of the Apostles to their own faith in Him. There is a real danger, in this desire to make a law out of the words of Jesus, that we discredit historical Christianity from its birth, and on the plea of exalting the Teacher deprive ourselves of the Saviour, the Holy Ghost, and the New Testament. I hold with the creeds that there is no true Church, and therefore no true faith but that which is Apostolic; and that the truth enshrined in the faith of the Apostles is the inmost truth with which theology has to deal.

When the nature of dogmatic has been so far determined, and a preliminary idea of the sources from which it is to be drawn has been obtained, the task of the theologian can be more clearly defined. He must begin by such an analysis of faith as will enable him to exhibit the religious principle of Christianity, out of which every part of the dogmatic system may be deduced, and to which every part of it may be referred. This religious principle, which, as the essential content of faith, possesses its primary certainty and authority, is sometimes spoken of as the fundamental dogma. The name is not inappropriate, if we remember to exclude from it any legal associations, and to invest it with all the authority of faith indeed, but with that alone.

The determination of the religious principle, or fundamental dogma, of Christianity, as involved in faith, will suggest, at least in outline, the programme of study.

It must begin with establishing the relation between Christianity and the other forms of religion which have existed in the world. After what has been said already, it will not be imagined that the independence of Christianity is to be called in question. Its authority is in itself; in the faith

in which it lives, in the experiences to which it introduces men, and the achievements it enables them to perform. But it is not the only thing in the world known as religion; and it is necessary to consider the phenomena of religion as a whole, and their relation to that which we hold to be the absolute religion. We hear a great deal of the history of religion; but it is a fair question, and, I think, a serious one, whether, apart from its revealed form, religion has had anything that can be called a history in the world at all. It has lived through time, of course, but that is not sufficient to give it a history; so have trees and birds and beasts and creeping things. It may even have wrought itself into the fabric of a particular human society, and shared its life and fate; but a human society in this sense—as a thing which dies and disappears, taking all that belonged to it in its train, religion included—is rather a natural than a historical phenomenon, and so is the religion which is interwoven with it. I repeat, it is a fair question whether anything has ever been known among men which is entitled to be called in the full sense a historical religion—a religion entering into the life of men with a ceaseless vital force, propagating itself with new energy from age to age, with an infinite power of assimilating and being assimilated by all new developments in the progress of mankind—except the religion of the Old and New Testaments. But without pressing that point of distinction, it is necessary to determine the relation of Christianity to the other religious phenomena in the world, and the relation of the consciousness of God, as it is determined by Christianity, to the consciousness of God (for surely there is such a thing) at lower levels—it remains a question in what sense one can say at lower stages. This is a preliminary, but in no way an unimportant, piece of dogmatic theology. As a system of Christian truth, dogmatic inevitably expands into a Christian view of the

world as a whole; and one of the points at which our interest in taking the Christian view as a whole becomes acute is that at which the other religions press themselves on our attention. They are not Christianity, they are not equivalents for Christianity, but they are at least manifestations of that in man to which Christianity makes appeal, and it would be an artificial and timid construction of Christianity that did not do what it could to appreciate them and determine its own relation to them. To do this is one thing; to determine the relation of Christianity to the so-called "natural religion" of philosophy, or to any particular rationalising of religion, whether by metaphysicians or anthropologists, is another, and a much easier. Such a determining of the relation of Christianity to other religions as makes it appear that Christianity satisfies the idea of religion, and is entitled to displace if not to absorb all else that claims that name, has sometimes been called Apologetic; but whatever the proper name for it may be, it seems to me to form a natural and inevitable introduction to dogmatic, and I shall treat of it in that light.

As to the exhibition of the contents of the fundamental dogma in detail, there are certain broad lines which the obvious necessities of the case impose upon every theologian. Let us say, for instance, that Christian faith involves the consciousness of reconciliation to God in Jesus Christ, and then proceed to ask ourselves how we can bring out fully and clearly to our minds, in a scientific form, the contents of this faith. It involves a Christian knowledge of God—a theology in the strict sense of the term. There is no part of the whole domain in which more difficult and far-reaching questions are raised than here. The God who is revealed to the Christian conscience in a special character in Christ Jesus is the God on whom all that is dependent, in whom all that is finds its chief end. The truth which is

ordinarily embodied in the doctrines of the creation and divine guiding and governing of the world falls, therefore, to be drawn out and defined in this connexion. But the consciousness of reconciliation to God in Jesus Christ involves also a consciousness of self in relation to God. Hence theology in the narrower sense is followed by anthropology. Anthropology is a name that has recently been annexed by a physical science, of somewhat indefinite boundaries; a science to which we owe a very great deal, but which has been to a considerable extent not only non-theological, but anti-theological. The anthropology of the theologian, it need not be said, is not physical, but theological; it is the doctrine of human nature as human nature is determined by its necessary relation to God; in particular, it is a doctrine of sin. This is a conception of which the physical anthropologist makes no use, and which he is very much inclined to deny; but the theologian finds it to be a constituent in the self-consciousness of Christian faith, and is bound to maintain it. But he is bound also—and this again is one of the points at which interest becomes acute—to take the facts of physics and of physical anthropology into account, and not to present as scientific an account of sin which stands in no relation to the other contents of the human mind upon the subject in question. He cannot have two minds; he cannot have two kinds of truth; and granting that there may be different ways of looking at or interpreting the same series of facts, a physical, *e.g.*, and an ethical or spiritual way, it is surely the business of the theologian, aiming as he does at a representation which does justice to the highest form of consciousness of which man is capable, to seek the reconciliation of these differences. When we say, further, that the consciousness of reconciliation to God in Jesus Christ involves a consciousness of Jesus Christ as the Reconciler, we have touched on the heart of Christian doctrine. Theology and

anthropology are combined in soteriology, or the doctrine of the Saviour and Salvation. This is indeed so fundamental that some theologians think it expedient to start with it, and treat theology and anthropology only so far as they are included in it, or dependent on it. But although the theology with which we are concerned is the doctrine of God as revealed in Christ to the Christian consciousness, and the anthropology is the doctrine of man as he is determined by his relation to God in Christ, the traditional order lends itself more easily to the effort which must be made to articulate Christian truth into the general framework of our knowledge, and for this among other reasons is preferred. All that remains of dogmatic is really the elaboration of soteriology. It has been analyzed into Christology, or the doctrine of Christ's Person, and soteriology in a narrower sense, the doctrine of Christ's work. These two really condition each other, and there is something to be said for the idea that our doctrine of what Christ is depends on our experience of what He does for us, as well as for the idea which seems to have determined the traditional order of treatment, that what Christ can do for us must depend on what He is. In either case, soteriology, as the doctrine of the salvation accomplished in and by Christ, must be completed by a doctrine exhibiting in its proper relations and proportions the application of this Christian salvation to individual souls, and its consummation in the Christian society which is called into being by the Gospel, and lives by faith. It is here that we have to treat of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, of what it has been customary to call the *ordo salutis*, of the Church and the means of grace which it administers, and by which it lives, and of the final hope which is guaranteed by faith. There is a point here at which dogmatic runs parallel to, if it does not coincide with, Christian ethics; but it is a doctrinal, not an ethical treatment, that has to be aimed at; and however wide the

range of subjects, we ought to be conscious all the time that they are included in the principle, or fundamental dogma with which we started, that they can all be justified by reference to it, and that all of them, equally with it, can appeal to the primary assurance which faith gives of its object.

Theology on this scale, and in the character I have tried to describe, makes great demands upon its students. It presupposes Christian faith and Christian experience; it can only be hopefully approached by one who is intimately familiar with the New Testament, and who has at least acquaintance enough with the history and experience of the Church to appreciate their importance for the study. But granted anything like the necessary equipment, we are bound to claim for theology a character which is not seldom contested, and which whole schools of theologians themselves seem inconsiderately ready to throw away. Faith, as I have said already, is the presupposition of every proposition the theologian enunciates; the truth which he claims to possess he possesses through faith, and in no other way. *All* his knowledge is *saving* knowledge, the knowledge of a believing man; that attitude of his whole being toward Jesus Christ which we call faith conditions it throughout. If we choose to say so, it is a knowledge which is relative to faith, just as our knowledge of nature is relative to the sensible and intellectual constitution in which we live. But we are not able to conceive that the realities to which faith introduces us are not real, the truths which it involves in itself not true; nor am I, for one, able to conceive two kinds of truth, or two sorts of reality which stand in no relation to one another. The unity of knowledge is presupposed in every exercise of the mind, and it seems to me a counsel of despair—a futile expedient to which no man living in the open air will seriously listen—to try to place theology in

an unassailable position by making the truth which it claims to interpret discontinuous with all the other truth in which our minds live. If we can do no better than this, we had better not begin. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is the God of whom and through whom and to whom are all things; and what physical science reveals of His nature and methods of working cannot stand in no relation to His character as that is revealed in Christ to faith. Of course I do not say that we can interpret these two things in consistency with each other at every point, still less that the certainty of faith must unconditionally surrender to that of science, where they seem to conflict; but I do say that a man has only one mind, and that it is his business to conciliate and to harmonize all that it contains. There may be incidental inconsistencies in it, but there must be no inconsistencies on principle. The attempt to expel metaphysics from theology is well intentioned, but it will not succeed. It is really a plea to decline consideration, in the science of theology, of the unity of all truth; and the end inevitably is that we have no knowledge at all. It is an appeal not to think, and such an appeal, addressed to the intelligence, must finally be in vain. The mind thinks in us whether we will or not, and thinks best perhaps when it goes of its own accord; but to give up striving for the unity of truth and knowledge would be to give up its own nature. The truth rather is, that instead of expelling metaphysics from theology, we must urge the claim of theology to be the only true metaphysics. Metaphysics is the science which deals with the ultimate reality of things, with the truth which is beneath, behind, and through all things, and makes them what they are. To a Christian man that ultimate reality is the reconciling love of God with which his faith has brought him acquainted in Jesus Christ. He can never

doubt the reality of that; he can never believe that there is any reality in the universe beyond it. It is his *ens realissimum* as well as his *summum bonum*. It is historically revealed, but it belongs to a world beyond time. He puts it in the place which the speculative philosopher fills with abstractions like being, or thought, or the universal self-consciousness, or the law of the world. It is far more real than these, as well as far more definite, and has a right to displace them. Every philosopher will tell you that his metaphysic is his theology; every theologian who thinks seriously must say that his theology is his metaphysic. The philosopher wants to see all things *sub specie æternitatis*, or, as Spinoza modestly put it at first, with a qualification which modern absolutists too lightly forget, *sub specie QUADAM æternitatis*; the theologian may not be attracted by the expression, but he is engaged in what is really the same task when he tries, as he is bound to do, to see all things *in Christo*. *In Christo*, the sign manual of all the Apostles, is the concrete Christian equivalent of the speculative *sub specie æternitatis*. Either aim is heroic, though only the Christian one is legitimate for the Christian; and though neither can be fully attained in a world in which we know in part, it is the very life of our souls to keep the true end in its unity before them. "The greatest part of our perfection is to thirst for perfection," and to keep the goal of Christian theology, which is the goal of the human spirit admitted to fellowship with the true God in Jesus Christ, perpetually before our eyes, though well aware that we can only greet it afar off, is the one hope of theological progress. To divide the mind, or to divide truth, is in the long run to renounce God. It is with no arrogance I speak emphatically of this, under no illusion that the theologian, any more than the speculative philosopher, can find out God to perfection; but in the strong conviction that in Jesus Christ we are in con-

tact with the ultimate truth and reality of the world, and that we must labour, in thought as in practice, to gather together in one all things in Him.

JAMES DENNEY.

THE DIABOLIC IMAGE.

(JOHN VIII. 43-47.)

TWICE over has our Lord, with fatal effect, put to a practical test the religious pretensions of the rabbis. First, they claimed to be the genuine spiritual descendants of Abraham. This claim He disposed of thus: "If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham"; but ye do not. Next they claimed a still higher spiritual lineage: "We have one Father, even God Himself." This He has just answered by a similar argument: "If God were indeed your spiritual Father, ye would love Me" and the truth which He sent Me to proclaim; but ye do not.

It is at this point that Jesus quits the defensive attitude which He has thus far maintained. No longer content to refute their claims, He assumes the aggressive. If their behaviour towards Himself was enough to show that they had no moral kindred either with Abraham or with God, must it not likewise prove whose moral likeness they did wear, or who was their real spiritual parent? Already, once and again, He had hinted that they lay open to such a retort, such a turning of the tables upon themselves. Now He does more than hint it. A simple question first, to spur them to reflect and sharpen their ears to hear; then to the last and most crushing blow of all, this mighty disputant strides on!

The preliminary question, to stimulate thought, is this: "Why is it ye do not understand My speech?" Ye hear Me talk day after day of the things I have seen and heard