

THE EMPEROR'S ORTHODOXY.

BY THE EDITOR.

EMPEROR William criticises Delitzsch for "abandoning the standpoint of the strict historian" and "straying into religious and historical conclusions and hypotheses which are quite nebulous and bold." He says that "the theologian has run away with the historian."

Probably the case is just the reverse. Professor Delitzsch, the son of an equally famous Hebrew scholar and a pious Christian, was from the start an orthodox theologian, but his theology was modified under the influence of his historical investigations. To the Emperor, who naturally clings to the old conception, Delitzsch seems to have twisted the results of his historical investigations (at least in the New Testament) to suit his theology. The Emperor concedes that "the Old Testament contains many sections which are of a purely human and historical nature," and goes even so far as to add that they "are *not* God's revealed word." He declares "that the legislative act on Sinai, for example, can only be symbolically regarded as inspired of God." Apparently the Emperor makes a difference between the Jewish and the Christian Scriptures, and in this sense he says: "Neither does it matter that much of the nimbus of the chosen people will thereby disappear."

This attitude of the Emperor is characteristic, and he being a pronounced upholder of militant and pious Protestantism, his views may be regarded as typical for large classes of all Protestant denominations.

The Emperor's letter is an important document in the evolution of religion: it opens to the Christian laity a period of discussion concerning the nature of the New Testament. The battle concerning the Old Testament is as good as ended. No one who has investigated the subject denies that the Old Testament is the product of an historical evolution. Of course, it is Jewish, not

Babylonian; nevertheless, the Babylonian civilisation forms the background, and many things which were formerly believed to have been dictated by the Holy Ghost are now seen to be the natural outcome of historical conditions. But on that account the nimbus of the chosen people will no more disappear than the glory of Homer, and Phidias, and Pericles, and Socrates can be dimmed because we can trace their greatness to conditions and understand how they naturally grew and rose into being.

The old narrow view is not abandoned at once, and many intermediate steps are taken which attempt compromises. So we read for instance in the interesting pamphlet of Alfred Jeremias that we must grant the prevalence of a monotheism among the pagan nations long before the rise of Israel as a nation. Hammurabi, for instance, a contemporary of Abraham who lived more than half a millennium before Moses, introduces his code of laws with the invocation, "Thus speaketh ILU SIRU, i. e., God the Supreme." "But," adds Professor Jeremias, "there is this difference between the pagan monotheism which can be traced among all the nations, and Hebrew monotheism, that "God himself filled the latter with his own revelation." In other words, when Plato speaks of God, we have to deal with a purely human speculation, but when David danced before the ark of the Lord we may be sure that then God was personally present.

The truth is, we are familiar with the Hebrew view, for our own belief has developed out of it. We are not so familiar with pagan views. Therefore when Zarathustra speaks of Ahura Mazda, the Lord Omniscient, we admire his wisdom, but fail to find any connection with our own belief. The term sounds strange to our ears because it remains unassociated with our prayers and has no relation to the traditions that have become sacred to us. It appears as the natural product of human thought, while the Hebrew names Jehovah, Zebaoth, Elohim, even when the context betrays a pagan or even polytheistic conception, are filled with a sanctity and a religious awe that is to us the evidence of a supernatural revelation.

How true this is appears from the fact that the original and correct form Yahveh, which is not used in our churches, does not possess the same sacred ring to our ears as the corrupted form Jehovah. The name Yahveh is written in our brains, not in our hearts. Yahveh is the name of a deity with which we have become acquainted through the study of Hebrew literature, and we would deem it all but a sacrilege, a kind of paganism, to pray to Yahveh

or to sing hymns to him. The word Jehovah, an unmeaning combination of the consonants of the word "Jahveh," with the vowels of another, "Adonai," was invented in the days of Luther. It was unknown before the year 1519; but having slipped into our prayers, we still sing the triumphal strain, "Jehovah is King."

When we become acquainted with the monotheism of Hammurabi, we put him down as a philosopher, but the God of Moses is the same God to whom Christians bend the knee. That makes a difference. The associations with our own religious life, our forms of worship, our prayers, are important for obvious psychological reasons.

Through Delitzsch, the Emperor became familiar with the religion of ancient Babylon, and he took a liking to the Assyrians. The Assyrian guards were so much like the Prussian grenadiers; their kings were generals enjoying the display of armies; they believed in the religion of the mailed fist and bestowed much attention upon military attire, even as to the minute details of hair-dressing. While the Emperor's court barber patented the fashion of an up-turned mustache under the name *Es ist erreicht*, Delitzsch speaks of the official style of the Assyrian beard as *Noch nicht erreicht*. The similarities were so many and so striking that the Emperor felt the thrill of kinship and showed himself willing to transfer the nimbus from the chosen people to the rulers of ancient Babylon.

Truly, the Emperor is right when he says that "God reveals himself continuously in the race of men." It is a good old doctrine, and orthodox too, that "God spoke not to Moses alone," and St. John the Evangelist says that "that was the true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world."

But it is natural that Christians raised in the traditional dogmatism should shrink from the idea that the New Testament (as well as the Old) should be conceded to be the product of historical conditions. "Here," they argue, "Christ speaks himself," and (to use the Emperor's own words) "Christ is God, God in human form We have in Him God's revealed word, and He never lies."

Certainly, God never lies. But do we have in the New Testament Christ's own words? We have reports about Jesus, and these reports are as human as are the Scriptures of the Old Testament. Christianity would be in a sad plight if the New Testament had indeed to be regarded as inspired *verbatim* by God. We cannot enter here into details but would suggest only that the mere contradictions in the Gospels alone force us to look upon them as human compositions.

The difficulties of regarding the Bible as literally the word of God are almost greater in the New Testament than in the Old. Any one who has studied the Scriptures knows that the problem is grave and cannot be easily disposed of.

The great question back of all these discussions is simply this: "Shall we, or shall we not, grant Science the right to modify Religion?" And the question need not be answered. Men of science know that whether or not we grant science the right to modify religion, science is shedding her light upon religious problems, and she is constantly and continuously modifying religion. Science (represented in physics, astronomy, physiology, psychology, history, text-criticism, etc., etc.) has enlarged our views of the world and deepened our conception of God. The scientific spirit of the age has begotten a new theology, a truly scientific treatment of the problems of God, inspiration, and revelation, which we call theonomy, for it ranges as high above the antiquated theology as astronomy is superior to astrology.¹

After all, Christians are not pledged to dogmas, but to the truth. Orthodoxy means the right doctrine, and the right doctrine is that which can stand the test of critique. Orthodoxy so called is a misnomer and ought to be called dogmatism. The truth can be found only by searching, and the methods of an exact search are called science.

Science is not human; science is divine, and the development of science is the coming of the spirit of God,—of the true God, of the God of Truth, who is "the light that lighteth every man."

The dogmas of Christianity are formulations of the Truth as interpreted by our forefathers. Let not Athanasius with his limited knowledge bind the conscience of a Delitzsch. Had he lived in the days of the Alexandrian church-father, he would most likely have acquiesced in the Nicene formulation of the Christian creed; but new issues have arisen and some of the traditional beliefs have become untenable. Dogmas may be venerable on account of their antiquity, but they cannot stand against Truth. Truth alone is holy, and the Truth of Science will finally win the day.

Delitzsch sums up his position in these words: "Do not let us blindly cling to dogmas which science has shown to be superannuated, merely for fear of abandoning them. Faith in God and the true religion may thereby be injured."

Whatever the final result of the present discussion shall be,

¹ Cf. the writer's articles "Theology as a Science" in *The Monist*, Vol. XII., No. 4. and Vol. XIII., No. 1.

we may rest assured that the modification of our religious faith will not be for the worse. Christianity has again and again adapted itself to a more scientific conception of the world. How strong was the opposition of the so-called orthodox to the Copernican system, how fierce were their attacks on the doctrine of evolution! But that is now a matter of the past, and religion has certainly been broadened as well as deepened by a broader and deeper insight into the constitution of nature. Therefore let us have faith in the Truth.

Says Esdras: "As for the truth, it endureth, and is always strong; it liveth and conquereth for evermore.

"With her there is no accepting of persons or rewards; but she doeth the things that are just, and refraineth from all unjust and wicked things; and all men do well like of her works.

"Neither in her judgment is any unrighteousness; and she is the strength, kingdom, power, and majesty of all ages. Blessed be the God of Truth." (1 Esdras iv. 38-40.)