

TENDENCIES OF MODERN THEOLOGY.

BY THE EDITOR.

THE present number contains two articles on the problem of modern theology, and in spite of difference in style and method the views of Mr. Hermon F. Bell and Mr. A. Kampmeier agree on the one point that both propose to find the only true ideal of religion in God himself, even going so far as to offer this as the substance of a universal creed in which all could acquiesce. This is true only in a general way, not in definite and important details, and so there are important points in which we beg to differ. We believe that though mankind will gradually come to possess one kind of science, and though the churches may agree in their belief as to the main facts, they will not become uniform in their religious institutions. We shall probably come to an agreement in our notions concerning the constitution of the world in which we live, the chief tenets of the moral ought, the nature of the soul, and the destiny of man after death, but our emotional needs being based upon different idiosyncracies will require different expressions.

Religion does not consist of doctrines only but embraces also ethics, ceremonies, customs, festivals, etc. In this respect religion partakes of the nature of art, and art offers a great variety of modes of expression. Even where the kernel of religion is the same, its institutions, its rituals, and the exterior show of devotion may be different. Methodists and Episcopalians do not differ so much in belief as in temperament, from which results the divergence in their modes of worship.

Our religious development tends toward a comprehension of the essential in religion, and the bottom fact of the religious conviction of Christianity has found expression in the doctrine of God.

Now it is characteristic of all serious monotheists that in their zeal for God, they become hostile to any other mode of religious expression, and so they are apt to become iconoclasts. They regard

icon-worship in any shape as idolatry, and so the Jews, the Mohammedans and also the early Christians were in the habit of breaking and mutilating the statues of the old gods. A kindred spirit manifests itself in several branches of the Reformation, especially among the Puritans, and as a result they exhibit hostility to art and their religion becomes a bald worship of abstract thought. Unitarianism is a product of this tendency to rationalize religion.

The Protestant spirit wants religion pure and simple—religion without romance, without mythology, if possible without ritual and symbol. Some Protestant churches go so far as to deny art admittance to sacred worship. Pictures as well as statues, incense, symbols, rituals, are scorned as pagan, and God is conceived in the abstractness of the idea more than after the fashion of mystical intuition. And yet, even the Protestant conception of God remains an allegory. God is conceived as a Father, as a great benevolent *seigneur* who with parental care watches over all his children and embraces them with tender love. Now since even this conception can no longer be taken literally but is a figure of speech, just as Christian legends are pious fairy tales, so we learn to appreciate again other dogmas such as the trinity doctrine, the romantic poetry of saint worship and the several allegorical methods employed by almost all the religions of the past.

Religion is our endeavor to adjust our relation toward the All in which we live, and in the different religions different symbols are used to denote the several factors that play a part in our world-conception. These symbols are more or less allegorical and are approximately exact only in philosophies of high scientific value. While it is desirable to have a religion that is pure, i. e., unalloyed with myth, myths, allegories and metaphors are not objectionable in themselves. On the contrary, under ordinary circumstances they recommend themselves on account of their poetic force especially for large multitudes of average people. Parables have always been recognized as helpful, the only drawback they have is that the ignorant take them literally, and while they insist on the letter, they overlook the meaning of the spirit. This clinging to the letter of a myth is characteristic of paganism which renders its devotees narrowminded and bigoted; but when we understand the spirit we grow tolerant toward the several myths and would not condemn one allegory because in the letter it contradicts our own favorite term. Thus Christian sects respect one another better the more they have learned to appreciate their intentions.

Mankind has had the same experience with reference to the

mythology of Greek antiquity. So long as there was danger of the gods being still believed in literally, there was a bitter hostility toward the ancient mythology, but in the days of the Renaissance, when there was no possibility of a return to paganism, the interest in antique traditions, the love of pagan art, and the admiration of classical ideals became firmly established and the recognition of their value is not likely ever to be shaken again.

The same will prove true of the pagan features of Christianity, and there is scarcely any of its doctrines and institutions which has not come down to us from pagan sources, or has its pagan prototypes. Are not the ideas of a god-man, of a god incarnation, of a saviour, of atonement for sin through sacrifice, yea through the innocent blood of the god-man himself, his martyr death and his final triumph after his restoration to life, traits in the pre-Christian religions of Egypt, Greece, Babylon, and India? Are not Osiris, Herakles and other Grecian heroes, Tammuz, Bel, Krishna and all the innumerable god-incarnations of the Gentiles prototypes of Christ?

The ideal of a god-man in religion is based upon a psychological need deeply rooted in man's soul. It is man's inborn tendency toward hero-worship. We admire great men, we praise them in song, exalt them and keep them before our eyes as examples worthy of imitation. This hero-worship is the quintessence of that peculiar type of religious devotion which in former ages begot the mythology of pagan saviours, and in the age of Christianity brought forth the ideal of Christ, the god-man.

Worship of God is indeed one most profound and significant mode of religious faith, but it is by no means the only one.* Hero-worship is another and both have been combined with wonderful skill in current Christianity.

In answer to Mr. Kampmeier's explanation of the origin of Christianity, I wish to state that according to my view proposed in a former article a new religion was preparing itself in the Roman Empire. The outlines of it had been formed and were pretty clearly pronounced at the time when the Apostle Paul was preaching. In the regions where he traveled, especially in Asia Minor, it was

* That monotheism is not the only possible form of a purified religion can no longer be doubted. The truth contained in the idea of God can be expressed in other ways as for instance in the Amitabha conception of Buddhism, and we must bear in mind that the idea of a personal God is also a symbol, an allegory, a simile that can not be taken literally. The conception of God as an individual being is untenable from a scientific point of view, but we do not intend to discuss the problem here because we have done so repeatedly on other occasions and have a book on the subject in preparation.

known by the name of gnosticism and its main ideas had been worked out to such an extent that St. Paul could use its terms without deeming an explanation of them necessary. This religious movement was predestined to accept the ideal of a saviour, a monotheistic trinity, the moral ideal of universal goodwill, a belief in future rewards and punishments, and also the establishment of a millennium, a kingdom of God on earth. All these ideas are pre-Christian, and St. Paul's work consisted mainly, perhaps solely, in claiming that the expected Saviour had actually appeared in Jesus the Nazarene.

The elements of this new religion are Gentile, not Jewish. They are positively un-Jewish. However they had crept also into Judaism through Persian influence and had tinged the extra-canonical writings known as the Old Testament Apocrypha.

I grant that the common interpretation of history is the one presented by Mr. Kampmeier that Christianity "has first gone through the Jewish mold"; I would say, however, that the religious syncretism of the Eastern part of the Roman Empire (Greece, Asia Minor and Egypt), having formed the outlines of a new religion, adopted Judaism as its ancestor, and then Judaism naturally became an increasingly influential factor in its further formation.

Paul's rapid success is due mainly to the fact that the leading ideas of the religion which he preached were already common property among the people whom he addressed. The chief point that was new in his preaching was the proposition that the expected Christ was Jesus who had been crucified and had risen from the dead. This identification of the Christ and Jesus had become plausible to the Gentiles on account of the exceptional position which the Jews held at the time and are still holding, for we must remember that the dispersion of the Jews does not date from the destruction of Jerusalem.

Paul made it plausible to the Greek people, to whom he addressed himself, that the expected Saviour should come from that mysterious race which was the sternest representative of monotheism.

While we sympathize with Mr. Bell in his belief in the importance of the idea of God, we suggest that his conception is on the one hand rather too narrow for scientific minds. On the other hand it is not fair to other expressions of religious faith than his own which is a rigid Unitarianism, for it appears that his strictures on Unitarianism indicate that he is at the bottom of his heart a Unitarian and he resents the present state of the Unitarian Church only

because it does not accept the ultimate conclusion of the Unitarian principle as he understands it.

I find no fault with the rigid monotheistic God-conception, but I wish to say a good word also for other forms of faith, be it Trinitarianism, Christolatry, the worship of the God-man (this religious efflorescence of hero worship), or even Buddhist, Brahman and Taoist forms of religious devotion.

The main thing for us is to appreciate the nature of religious dogmas and remember that they are symbols. The letter of a religious myth is untrue, it is fiction, but its spirit may be true and it is our part to discover the truth that is hidden in the metaphor.