

SCIENCE IN THEOLOGY.¹

BY CARL HEINRICH CORNILL.

GENTLEMEN:—Allow me to begin with the conscientious assurance that I should have been heartily glad if I had been spared the necessity of speaking on this matter; but since the “Motion Against the Professors” has been made and opened for discussion, I may not, being the only professor of theology present,—I must not keep silence, for to do so would be, not evidence of a peaceable and conciliatory spirit, but cowardice and a denial of the station and calling in which God has placed me. Therefore I must speak, and prepare the way only by saying that as I belong to no faction or fraction of this synod, neither do I speak in the name or under commission of any fraction, but solely in my own name and that of my calling.

To be sure, when I consider the letter of the motion before us, which refers to “appointment in evangelical-theological faculties of such professors only as stand within the confession of the Church,” it might appear doubtful whether I really am called on to speak, for personally I do not feel that the letter of the motion touches me at all. Gentlemen, I stand within the Confession of the Church, this I can say unhesitatingly. For I stand firmly and

¹By the courtesy of Dr. C. H. Cornill we are favored with advance proofs of his address on the *Professorenantrag*, or Motion Against the Professors, given on the 30th of October before the sixth session of the Fourth West Prussian Provincial Synod, as prepared by him for publication in the *Danziger Zeitung*, No. 22,281. Von Puttkamer-Plauth, who advocated the motion, had preceded Dr. Cornill, and though speaking in a conciliatory tone, and denying any purpose to assail free research, had declared that the advocates of the measure distinguished between freedom of research and freedom of instruction; no one would think of restricting research, but it was a menace to the Church, and not to be permitted, that the professors of theology should forthwith teach their results, and announce to the young theologues as accepted scientific truths undemonstrated hypotheses on which the Church had not yet passed judgment. Dr. Cornill's high standing as an investigator, his position in the University of Königsberg, and the fact that he spoke as delegate of the theological faculty of Königsberg, lend interest to the views expressed. He resolutely places theology among the sciences, and denies its subordination to the Church. This address has been translated by W. H. Carruth.—[*Editor*.]

clearly upon the foundation of the Apostles' Creed,—the Apostles' Creed without higgling and haggling, without distortion and subtilising. And in case this does not suffice, and you demand a more specific sectarian confession,—well and good, as a genuine old Huguenot, in my whole church feeling and consciousness I belong to the strict Reformed¹ Confession. If there were in this synod a group of the Reformed Church, I should have felt constrained to ally myself with it, and should have done so as flesh of my flesh and bone of my bone.

But despite this, I may say without presumption or conceit that wherever the Motion Against the Professors is discussed by those who are acquainted with current theological literature, my name and person will not be among the least. For indeed, I am considered in the widest circles as an especially wicked and dangerous specimen of the species of professor against whom this motion is directed.

This is to me the clearest proof that your motion goes farther than the letter of it says, and that it is in reality directed against theological science and free investigation. This "wicked criticism" is to be stifled and driven out of the Church. Hence you must permit me to treat your motion from the point of this its ultimate aim; and I wish to show you that your motion begins with a wrong premise, that it seeks its end in a wrong way, and that, even if it is carried, it will do no good, but rather infinite harm.

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Your motion starts from a wrong premise. Expressed or suppressed, it is based on the theory that science has a tendency to systematically assail and deliberately undermine church doctrine. But this premise is entirely erroneous.

Science has no tendency whatever, but is solely the search for truth. To find the truth, or at least to seek it, is its only aim, and for the attainment of this sole aim it has for means and ways the approved method of scientific research. Whither this search shall lead, it never knows in advance, and is therefore not answerable for the results. A problem arises; it must be solved. If we can assure ourselves that this solution was reached by the path of strictly methodic research, we must submit to the result, and submit unconditionally, whether or not it be agreeable to us personally. And, gentlemen, this truth which science discerns, or thinks

¹The Presbyterians or Calvinists call themselves Reformed in Germany. The members of the synod are Lutherans; but both confessions, Lutherans and Presbyterians, are united in the State Church, officially known as Die Evangelische Kirche, having a common church government, under which, however, both parties enjoy a perfect freedom of worship.—[Editor.]

she discerns, it is my *solemn duty*, as a servant of science, to proclaim. I will not quote here the familiar student song about him

"Who knows the truth and hides its light,
[He is a pitiful cowardly wight]."

But this much I must say: if the commission to teach were limited by such a condition, then as an honest and—pardon the harsh word—a decent man, nothing would be left for me but to resign my professorship. To say to us: you professors may investigate as much as you will, but you must keep the results of your investigation to yourselves, that is to forbid us to teach what we have perceived to be the truth,—this amounts simply to forbidding us to lecture, if we wish to keep our self-respect. We never will and never can agree to that. It is our sacred right to announce the truth which we know, even before our students; we shall not let it be taken from us; with that we stand or fall. But if a divine power, which has for goal solely the search for truth, is to be suspected and crowded out of the Church, it looks indeed just as if the Church had reason to shun the truth, and could not endure it. But this is quite inconceivable.

Jesus Christ called himself the truth and the king of truth, born and come into the world to bear witness to the truth, and his greatest apostle writes: "We can do naught against the truth." No truth, not even scientific truth, is a menace to the Church of Jesus Christ, the King of Truth. He, in whose mouth was no guile, promised his Church that not even the gates of Hell should prevail against it. And in the face of such a promise you fear that what the gates of Hell can not achieve might be done by a few professors of theology? No, gentlemen, I think higher of the Church of Jesus Christ, and more modestly of us professors.

The Church must be able to bear every and any truth, and indeed it can. I would remind you of the time when the Copernican cosmogony was appealing ever louder and more urgently to hearts and minds. Many serious and pious Christians believed then that if Copernicus and Galileo were right, it was all over with the Scriptures and the Church for all time. But the Church has endured the Copernican cosmogony, for it is the truth, and stands to-day unmoved and unmovable.

Moreover, the way in which you propose through your motion to attain your end is not the right one. I know and recognise how delicate and questionable a proceeding it is to apply the words of Jesus to oneself and one's own circumstances, but even at the risk

of being misinterpreted I must confess that in the face of the Motion Against the Professors the saying keeps coming into my mind : " If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil, but if well, why smitest thou me ? " Yes, gentlemen, if we have spoken evil, prove that it is evil. Science is a spiritual power which can be met only with spiritual weapons, and not with laws and police regulations. Science, too, is a manifestation of the spirit of which Paul the Apostle writes to the Thessalonians : " Quench not the Spirit. "

This spirit, it is true, sometimes cuts strange capers, and in science, too, there are not alone gold, silver, and precious stones, but also wood, hay, and stubble. But even if the spirit manifests itself in a way to rouse apprehension, and if you consider it harmful and dangerous, remember the parable of the wheat and the tares, " let both grow together until the harvest. " And this you can do with all confidence, for this harvest and the judgment in general do not wait until the Last Day, but are being accomplished even now. Science bears its own corrective within itself. In science, too, " the dead ride fast "—terribly fast. And precisely the extreme and unsound tendencies are the ones which experience shows to have had a particularly swift decline.

It is exactly twenty-four years since *The Old and the New Faith*, by D. F. Strauss, appeared. You will all recall the tremendous excitement which it caused at the time ; and where is it to-day, after twenty-four years ? Submerged and forgotten. I think even the most innocent small-beer Philistine would be ashamed and feel antiquated in culture if he caught himself quoting or mentioning this book. And to cite a more significant and thoroughly serious scientific manifestation : Thirty-six years are fled since the death of F. C. Baur, the head of the " Tübingen School. " For a whole generation it was believed that the Tübingen School would annihilate Church and Christianity, and where is it now ? Dissolved in smoke and wind, while the church of Jesus Christ remains. Not in vain, indeed, did Baur and his Tübingen School labor and investigate, but that the foundation theory of Baur was wrong, and his inferences therefore unsound, is recognised to-day frankly and unreservedly by the most critical investigators. Science has passed by him to the " order of the day. " Therefore leave science without anxiety to the ordeal of history. Without the aid of us weak men to turn the cranks, God's mills grind surely, and in this field, perhaps, more swiftly than elsewhere.

But, you will reply, until such a tendency has run its course it may do infinite harm, confuse minds and poison souls. Let me an-

swer this objection with a bit of personal experience. When I began my instruction in Königsberg ten years ago with a course of lectures on Genesis, I had among my hearers a young man, the son of a well-known clergyman. At the end of the semester the young man gave up the study of theology and turned to jurisprudence. Thereupon I was taken to task, not indeed by the father of the young man, but by the most authoritative person at that time in the East-Prussian provincial Church, as being to blame, and having by my lectures on Genesis unsettled the young man's faith and driven him away from theology. My reply was: "If this is really true, which, however, I will not believe until I have it from the young man himself, then I think I have done a service to theology and the Church; for one who is unsettled in his faith in all Christianity and the Church by the fact that Moses did not write Genesis, will be of no use to us in this fearfully serious and trying time." The ultimate development of the affair, which brought me a complete vindication, I have thought and still think it indelicate to report, because I regard it as a sacred personal secret between the young man and myself; but this much I may say, that the late General Superintendent of Prussia, after I had had a thorough understanding with him in the matter, became and remained to me until his death a truly paternal friend.

No, gentlemen, in a time of combats in all directions, such as Church and theology have to wage, we have no use for semi-invalids and cripples, but only for strong, whole, thoroughly tried men. A wavering reed that is blown hither and thither by the wind may, if God will, become anything, only not a theologian, and if we help such to a clear perception of the fact that they are not fitted to be theologians there is no harm done.

And even if you carry your motion you will not attain the end in view. Even if you succeeded in shutting out from theological professorships all scientific investigators you have not thereby stifled scientific research itself. For we shall investigate afterwards as before, and will publish the results of our researches, and is it likely that the printed word will have less effect than that spoken from the chair? Then you would needs suppress the printing of books; and consider well, even our laymen read scientific books, and, as a result of the widespread efforts at popularising science by lectures, journals, and books for the masses, laymen become acquainted with the results of scientific research.

And now suppose the case, that such a layman, interested in science, has read a book or hears a lecture, and comes to his pas-

tor and asks for instruction and explanation: "My dear pastor, how is this? I have read and heard thus and so, and in Bible history we learned quite a different story." What shall the pastor do with such a layman? Shall he simply fall back on the dogma of inspiration and answer the layman: "Friend, that doesn't concern me, and needn't concern you, for 'it is written,' " etc.? If he acted thus he would, to speak frankly, play a miserable part, and hopelessly compromise himself and the church. At every turn he finds himself face to face with modern science, and it is *a power once for all* against which the tactics of the ostrich will avail nothing.

It is wholly impossible to shield young theologues from contact with modern science; it simply cannot be done in this day and age of the world.

In the First Epistle of Peter it is said: "But be ever ready to give account to every one who demands a reason for the hope that is in you," and this apostolic admonition applies especially to the theologian, the clergyman. But in order to be ever ready to give account to every one the clergyman must know modern science, he must have assimilated it and inwardly taken position regarding it. And if this is his most sacred duty to himself and his office, if on this very account he must know science and dare not abstain from intimate acquaintance with it, well, then it is by all means best that he make this acquaintance through authorised servants and representatives, from whom he will receive the impression that the chief concern here is not frivolous mockery, not satanic delight in negation and destruction, but serious wrestling and striving for truth.

This measure, therefore, will not only do no good, but will do infinite harm. For organisations are sustained only by the powers which gave them birth.

Repeated reference has been made to-day to Luther and the reformers. Those, too, were professors; they searched in the Scriptures and the history of the Church, and when this research had led them to the conclusion that the Church of that day did not correspond to the norm of the Gospel, they did not keep this revelation to themselves because the Church of the time had not yet approved it, but they proclaimed it loudly and freely to the benefit of millions and millions of truth-seeking souls. The right of free research, limited only by God and the conscience, made the evangelical Church: to banish from it the right of free research is giving up the palladium of the Reformation, and forcing the Church back to the point from which our divinely favored reformers, by their labors as professors, happily freed it—and then rather let us simply

return to the fold of St. Peter ; for the Catholic Church knows how to get rid of science and bridle its professors : through the close-laid walls of that gigantic structure flows no breath of freedom and criticism.

Up to this point I have treated the matter altogether negatively and on the defensive ; but I cannot close without adding a positive word. For it is a necessity and a pleasure to me to speak of it : At the bottom of your endeavors there is a justifiable motive. That the Church shall exercise an influence, and that a decisive and determinative influence upon the training of its future servants is not merely a proper demand, it is a necessity. But let it be done in the right way and in the right place. Precisely as professor of theology, I feel obliged to confess that the simple academic instruction is not sufficient for the training of theologians, but that it absolutely needs a supplement which only the Church can give. It is not important whether a man knows a few Hebrew vocables more or less, or a few dates more or less in Church history, but that he can preach and minister to souls. And precisely in this most important matter academic instruction fails us. Even assuming the greatest excellence in the professor of practical theology—by two or three sermons given in the homiletic seminary, with his fellows and the critical professor for congregation, a student cannot learn to preach, and for practice in parish duties the university as such offers him no opportunity at all. There is a proper idea in the plan which formerly was in vogue at Giessen, where practical theology was excluded from the university on principle and left to the ministers' seminary in Friedberg, which every young theologian was required to attend. Here at this most important point the Church must enter the breach ; here it has a sacred duty and an inalienable right. If you would all apply the strength and energy, the activity and persistence which have been expended upon the ill-fated "Motion Against the Professors," to agitating for more ministers' seminaries, at least one for each province, and the requirement that every theologian, without exception, undergo a term, and not too short a term, as curate, then indeed you would be working in the interest and for the benefit of our beloved Evangelical Church.

And be assured that under this banner you would be followed enthusiastically by all who bear the evangelical name ; then you would find even the heretical professors shoulder to shoulder with you in the front rank. I can confidently assure you of this, not only for myself but also in the name of all my colleagues, for we, too,

wish nothing more urgently than a clear-cut and peaceful division and a co-operation based on mutual respect and recognition between science and the Church.

✓ As men of science, we must demand that to science be given what to science belongs ; but we are just as ready to give to the Church what is the Church's. You introduced your motion from highly worthy motives and as earnest Christian men forced in conscience by the motto, *Videant consules ne quid detrimenti ecclesia capiat*. But in the same spirit you in turn must permit me, without any personal consideration and purely from love for the Church, which I, too, love truly and with faithful heart, to beg this honorable synod not to make this motion its own. For with this proposal our Church would come upon an inclined plane ; but if the ball once begins to roll, it will roll in obedience to the law of gravity, irresistibly and ever swifter—*downwards*. And as the end of this inclined plane I see a condition described by the fearful phrase—Culture paired with unbelief, Christianity with barbarism ; and from that may God in mercy guard and defend His Church.