

Current Topics

The Higher Critics

Those insidious wreckers of religious faith—the higher critics, so called—who talk in large and spacious fashion about the ‘reconstruction of theology’ and the ‘elimination of the archaic elements in religious belief,’ always speak and write as if there was only one possible view of the question, and as if all learning and all culture were on their side. They are *the* people, and when they go, wisdom will die with them. This is, of course, a very one-eyed and lop-sided presentation of the position. As a matter of fact, broadly speaking, the great minds right down the centuries have been on the side of definite faith, as against nebulous unfaith; and no Christian paper—and no Christian professor—which has to deal with the subject is acting honestly with its audience if it fails to place fairly and squarely before the public eye the fact that ripe scholarship, wide culture, and deep piety are represented in the fullest measure on the historical conservative side. In this case, as in most others, a suppression of the truth is distinctly a suggestion of the false.

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In connection with this aspect of the question, some remarks made by an American secular paper—the *Detroit News*—are very much to the point. Commenting on criticisms directed against a course announced by Dr. Wesley, a professor in the Ann Arbor University, which was recognised to be antagonistic to the fundamental ideas of Christianity, the editorial writer in the *News* says:—‘After all, this matter must turn on the question of dealing fairly with the student. It is not fair to him to allow him to think, to virtually compel him to think, that all scholarship is on the side of the rehashed destructive temper in which religion is handled in the university. The present course in philosophy would appear to be deliberately planned to take from him every spiritual support he ever knew, and then leave him alone and unguided in the stony wastes of negation. The very best a multitude of students can do after this treatment is to struggle back to what Carlyle calls “the centre of indifference,” and drop the matter as nearly as their natures will allow them to drop it. They are not reminded by any circumstance that there is as superb a scholarship in the service of sane faith as there is in that of the destroyers. They are confined to one man’s mood and mind; they are not permitted to see that strong minds have grappled with the same big problems and have drawn light and help from them. Until the student is given a fair statement of both sides of the matter by men competent to do it, no university can ever claim the credit of dealing fairly with him.’

Getting their turn

It makes all the difference in the world whose ox is gored. So long as the tyrannical and grossly unjust French governmental persecution appeared to be directed exclusively against the Catholic Church, Protestants for the most part viewed it with great equanimity—in some cases, indeed, expressed warm and active approval of it. The President of the New Zealand Methodist Conference, for example, went out of his way to officially congratulate the French Government on ‘their determined stand against clericalism’ and expressly endorsed their policy of repression. Now it appears that the same weapons of savage attack and persecution are being turned against the Protestant missionaries in Madagascar, and our Protestant friends do not like it a bit. Madagascar, as everybody knows, is a French possession off the coast of Africa. English Protestant missionaries have been laboring there for some years, but the colonial Government, taking their cue from the home authorities, have lately been riding rough-shod over the conscientious rights of the Protestants, just as in France the officials are oppressing and persecuting Catholics.

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The *Congregationalist* tells the story, with loud-voiced protest. It tells us that the ‘militant secularism which has been the outstanding feature of French life at home, has even in an exaggerated and apparently malicious and bigoted form done its best to root out Christianity among the Malagasy people altogether. . . . The missionary schools have been broken up, the graduates denied French citizenship, the heathen rites encouraged, Christianity everywhere denounced and repressed.’ We have over and over again pointed out—what has long been patent to careful observers—that the French Government’s war against the Catholic Church is a war against all forms of Christianity, and indeed against all forms of religion. The sects in France have hitherto escaped merely because of their insignificance. Referring editorially to the fact

we have mentioned, the *Boston Herald*, under the heading ‘Anti-Christian France,’ remarks:—‘Evidence accumulates that France, in its reaction from a particular form of Christian truth and policy, has gone far on the way toward anti-religious views of a particularly secular and virulent form. Its State schools, that once were pledged to neutrality in matters of religion, are now, in many cases, agencies for attack on religion as such; and the secular conception of the State and anti-religious tenor of governmental policy have gone forth into the colonies.’ Even in France itself Protestants are now beginning to feel the pinch. A correspondent, writing to the *Catholic Herald* on the situation, says:—‘The effects of the separation of the Church from the State in France are felt very much by the Protestants as well as by the Catholics. During last year the deficit in the incomes of their churches was 160,000 francs, and the prospect in the near future does not look much brighter. It may also be mentioned that the number of students entering upon the study of theology in the two Protestant faculties in Paris and Montauban is diminishing considerably.’ Now that our Protestant friends are, to some slight extent, companions with us in misfortune, they will probably take a truer and broader view of the position in France.

A Scientist's Confession of Faith

The shallow talk about the incompatibility of science and faith, and about the difficulty which the scientific mind is alleged to find in ‘swallowing’ religious dogma, is for the most part the cackle only of the very small fry in the scientific world. The really great scientist—the man who is raised by genius above his fellows—is always a humble man, usually a deeply religious man, and at the least and worst is a man with the bump of reverence well developed. Some interesting and striking illustrations of this truth are supplied in a recent work published by the Fordham University Press, New York, entitled *Makers of Electricity*, by Brother Potamian, F.S.C., D.Sc., London, Professor of Physics in Manhattan College, New York; and James J. Walsh, M.D., Ph.D., LL.D., Dean and Professor of Nervous Diseases and of the History of Medicine at Fordham University. Dr. Walsh refers to Galvani, the discoverer of animal electricity; Volta, who reduced it to a science; Ampere and Ohm, whose names are perpetuated in electricity’s peculiar measurements; Faraday, the great experimenter, and Maxwell, who gave mathematical precision to its control; all of whom, giants of earth and air, were humble, gentle, God-fearing men. Of Galvani Dr. Walsh tells how his skill as a surgeon was freely given to the poor, while the rich he refused to treat, saying they could afford to hire other physicians. He was buried in the habit of the Third Order of St. Francis. Regarding Ampere, whose name will ever be inseparably linked with the science of electro-dynamics which he founded, we are told that he learned by heart almost the whole of a Kempis’ *Imitation of Christ*. Pasteur, when questioned as to his religious faith, is reported as having replied: ‘The more I know the nearer my faith approaches to that of the Breton peasant—did I know all, it would doubtless be like that of the Breton peasant’s wife.’ A similar spirit had been shown, a century before, by the great Volta—the inventor, at the early age of thirty, of the electric pile which first produced the electric fluid in an even, easy, controllable stream. According to Dr. Walsh, Volta knew the value of daily Mass, and was known by his neighbors for his devotion to the Rosary and his visits to the Blessed Sacrament.

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When he was at the very zenith of his fame and all Europe was ringing with his praises, it was spread about among the ‘scholars’ of France and Italy that so great a scientist could not be, as was said, a religious man. To his lasting honor, Volta put in black and white, for all the world to see and read, a plain and explicit statement of his belief. Volta’s confession of faith ran as follows:—‘If some of my faults and negligences may have by chance given occasion to some one to suspect me of infidelity, I am ready, as some reparation for this and for any other good purpose, to declare to such a one, and to every other good person, and on every occasion and under all circumstances, that I have always held, and hold now, the Holy Catholic Religion as the only true and infallible one, thanking without end the good God for having gifted me with such a faith, in which I firmly purpose to live and die, in the lively hope of attaining eternal life. I recognise my faith as a gift of God, a supernatural faith. I have not on this account, however, neglected to use all human means that could confirm me more in it and that might drive away any doubt which could arise to tempt me in matters of faith. I have studied my faith with attention as to its foundations, reading for this purpose books of apologetics as well as those written with a contrary purpose, and trying to appreciate the arguments pro and contra. I have tried to realise from what sources spring the strongest