

Recent Theological Movements in France and French Switzerland.

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IN several consecutive articles I wish to attempt to sketch, for English readers, the character, *rôle*, and influence of the principal Protestant theological faculties of France and French Switzerland. But before approaching this subject, it may be well to give a general view of the state in which French-speaking theology actually stands. As in England—even more than in England and Scotland—the present state is one of crisis. With us the same problems present themselves, the same questions arise that occur elsewhere; namely, those touching the religious value of the Bible, the method and contents of divine revelation, the relations of this revelation with man's natural faculties, and above all,—indeed, inclusive of all,—the nature of authority in matters of faith. On all these points, and especially on the last one, the lines of demarcation are deep, and at first sight the confusion is complete. Nevertheless, on looking nearer, we soon perceive that the different streams of opinion resolve themselves into two main branches; one inclining towards the old orthodoxy, the other, in so far as it attains distinctness, making in the direction of an evangelical Protestantism more consistent with the very principles laid down by the Reformers of the sixteenth century. What separates the two parties is a question of method: they do not differ about faith itself, but on the manner in which faith is to be acquired and conceived. This difference appears, at first sight, unimportant. But if we remember that, viewed under one aspect, Protestantism and Romanism themselves are only separated from each other by method; if we recollect that the results of Catholicism are contained in its way of interpreting Christianity, and that the results of Protestantism in their turn are involved in another way of interpreting the same Christianity,—if we bear these facts in mind, we must recognise that the present situation is not lacking in gravity and seriousness. Now the old orthodoxy, precisely in the degree in which it is obliged to defend a position once universally allowed, proves itself the more clearly a check in the development and application of the essential principle of the Refor-

mation, and even a sort of spurious compromise between the peculiarly Protestant method and that of the Roman Catholic Church. Its notions on the plenary inspiration and literal infallibility of the Bible, and on the external authority of dogma, bring it, by its fundamental conception of the Christian facts, singularly near its former enemy, the Roman Church. Thus it is not attacked, as some affect to believe, solely in the name of Science and the recent discoveries of the Higher Criticism, but in the name of faith itself, and of the inalienable rights of that religious individuality which is the most authentic fruit of the Reformation. The new theology, indeed, has for ultimate object not a scientific, but a religious revision of doctrine. It does not labour, in the first instance, in the interests of science, but in those of religion. It submits that faith should be spiritual, and consequently individual; it aims at basing it on personal experience, and not on the external authority of an ecclesiastical dogma; it believes that the inner assent of the soul to itself, far more than the passive acceptance of a doctrine, produces conviction, and that the chief organ of this conviction is moral consciousness appropriating the spiritual realities of salvation. At the foundation of Christian certitude it places, not the collective belief of the Church, but the believer's individual experience: it accentuates strongly the experimental character of Christianity. It affirms that on the experience of the Christian finally depend the authority and contents of his testimony. Beyond all doubt, here are two contrasted spirits which meet and strive together; from their encounter will result a new departure for religious science. The conflict has proceeded more or less keenly for several years, and with varying success. It has been particularly sharp, latterly. On both sides the papers and reviews are full of discussions and controversies; "tracts for the times," pamphlets, and sermons abound, and we cannot yet say on whose side is the victory. What complicates the struggle is, first, the weak numerical minority which the Protestant population—especially in France—represents. Isolated and, as it were,

submerged in a nation which shares neither its beliefs nor its religious prepossessions, there are not formed in this minority those broad popular currents which aid in the triumph of a cause. Public opinion is but feebly moved by it, and discussion, preserving the impress of the schools, passes chiefly from teacher to teacher, which means that it is at once more personal, more violent, and more barren. Add to this, that the Latin races, as much by age-long education and the Catholic heredity which is theirs, as by their own genius, are more or less opposed to *individualisme*, and especially to religious *individualisme*.

In politics the Frenchman is apt to hand over to the State decisions and measures which in England would proceed from the private initiative of the citizens. In religion it is the same, and in a greater degree. The Catholic Church has for too many centuries been usurping a position and prerogatives which belong only to the believer's conscience, not to have thereby permanently enfeebled the latter. From the time of the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, which banished from the land the most highly-tempered souls among the Huguenots, Protestantism has itself been subjected to this influence. It has not dwelt with impunity in an atmosphere hostile to

the principle it represents, and it has thereby lost something of its first integrity. It dallies unconsciously with the very tendencies it reproves; and when it frees itself from them, it is by a passionate effort which transforms into a violent reaction that which ought to have been accomplished by a gradual evolution. Because of the very opposition it meets with, and through that demand for absolute logic which is part of the mental organisation of the race, it crosses at a single bound the intermediate stages, and without transition presses on to the most extreme consequences.

Such, in brief outline, are the conditions under which proceeds among us this reformation within the Reformation, towards which tend and strive the evangelical churches in every land. These conditions, more unfavourable here than elsewhere, give to our religious development a stamp of intensity, and involve it in special difficulties which must be considered in order to judge of it aright. We hope, however, in the sequel to show that under the extreme opinions held by some, there is being formed in the bosom of the Church, and making for a theology at once more evangelical and more liberal, a new current of thought, to which we believe the future belongs.

The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus.

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IV.

DID Jesus designate the ideal state of filial relation to God, in which He Himself stood during His earthly life, and which in the same way He sought to establish in His disciples in the present life before the future perfect state began, by a comprehensive phrase?

At the institution of the Holy Supper He used the phrase "the new covenant" (Luther translates, the new testament), to denote the new peculiar kind of fellowship between God and man, which He Himself founded (Mark xiv. 24; 1 Cor. xi. 25). In this phrase He followed in the train of the promise of Jeremiah (xxxii. 31 ff.), that in the last days God would make a new covenant with His people, not like the covenant made at Sinai and

broken by the Israelites, but a covenant wherein God would write His law in their heart and mind, and they should be His people, and He their God. Jesus held that the fulfilment of this promise is effected by His work on earth, and now will not be interrupted by His approaching death; but, on the contrary, will for the first time be firmly established. As then formerly Moses, after receiving and proclaiming the law on Sinai, had offered a burnt-offering and thank-offering in order to solemnly ratify the conclusion of the legal covenant between God and the people (Ex. xxiv. 1 ff.), so Jesus described His death as a sacrifice to God to ratify the new covenant which He proclaimed and established. Although Jeremiah had not promised the

setting up of the new covenant as preceding the blessed state of the last days which was to be established by miraculous means, but as becoming fact in this very state, Jesus did not teach that the fulfilment of this promise would first begin in the future state of blessedness opening with His second advent, but that it was established for the community of His disciples at present by His earthly ministry and by His death. But with the same right and in the same sense He could hold, that by the fulfilment of His earthly vocation the "*kingdom of God*" had come to initial realisation at present, notwithstanding the fact that, according to the Jewish Old-Testament conception, this kingdom was to be established only at the complete transforming of all things by God's miraculous intervention and the judgment on the nations.

For so it is in fact. Alongside the utterances quoted formerly, in which the idea of God's kingdom is plainly a designation of the future state of blessedness opening with the future advent of Christ, stand other utterances, in which just as plainly this idea of God's kingdom denotes a state already existing during the present earthly life of Jesus Himself and His disciples. The attempts to explain away this meaning can only satisfy one who is certain beforehand that the kingdom of God in the mouth of Jesus can never have signified a state realised already on earth; but they necessarily appear insufficient to all who desire to learn by investigating the sayings of Jesus Himself in what sense, simple or manifold, Jesus used this idea.

He compared the kingdom of God to mustard-seed and leaven (Mark iv. 30-32; Luke xiii. 18-21). The kingdom of God in the future æon opening with Christ's second advent will not start from small beginnings, gradually overcome all hindrances and exhibit its greatness and dominant force, but in consequence of the great judgment of God, which sweeps away all God-opposing elements and brings the good to eternal bliss, will stand forth in finished power and glory. The progress of God's kingdom, resembling mustard-seed and leaven, must belong to the earthly present, where it is found amid alien powers and communities, which in its gradual advance it outstrips and transforms. Is it not a thoroughly unsatisfactory makeshift to be obliged, in order to avoid this thought, to declare that the kingdom of God itself is compared to mustard-seed and leaven only in inexact language; really the word, the preaching of the gospel is

meant? Yes, indeed, the parabolic discourse, at the close of which Mark gives the parable of the mustard-seed, begins with the parable of the sower (iv. 3 ff.), in which Jesus shows how the word preached has no result, or a mere passing, or rich and richest result, according to the unreceptiveness or receptiveness of the men it comes to. But then the other oracles point out (Mark iv. 21-25) that the end of preaching is not to remain hidden and inoperative, even if at first it is carried on in secret; but, on the contrary, to find free action and rich success with the receptive. And hereupon in the parable of the seed, which grows and ripens to fruit-bearing ears without aid and knowledge of men (vers. 26-29), and lastly, in the parable of the mustard-seed (vers. 30-32), Jesus expresses His confidence that the preaching of the kingdom of God will gradually, but surely, find its designed success, and that this success will be vaster than one would ever expect from its apparently small beginning. But this very *success of the preaching* of God's kingdom, according to the conception of Jesus, is *the existence of the kingdom of God itself*, gradually unfolding on earth from the smallest beginning. Thus, when one takes into account the connexion of thought with the parable of the sower, it appears not an inexact and unintelligible, but thoroughly obvious conclusion to say, that *the kingdom of God itself*, not the word of the kingdom of God, is compared to mustard-seed.

Further, at the time when Jesus expressed a judgment on John the Baptist, and described him as the Elijah promised by the prophet (Matt. xi. 10-14), He uttered the saying: "From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and men of violence take it by force" (ver. 12). The strong expressions of doing violence, and violent seizing of possessions, are remarkable. But may we conclude from them that Jesus speaks in a rebukeful sense of those "in whom the Baptist's preaching has excited a passionate agitation," who "would seize by violence what they should wait for"? If Jesus had wished to rebuke such perverse efforts—of which we have otherwise no trace—He should have declared that by such violent, passionate trying and striving to reach the kingdom of God no one could really get it into his power and possession. But of vain effort there is not a word; on the contrary, Jesus declares quite plainly that they who strive violently succeed in really carrying off the kingdom of God as a prey.

Now in the mind of Jesus, self-evidently the possibility is quite precluded of any one succeeding in attaining the kingdom of God by unjust means against God's will. Therefore, in the figurative phrase of violent striving after prey, Jesus cannot have meant to describe an unjust mode of acquisition, but only energetic pressing after valuable good, just as in Luke xiv. 26, *e.g.*, by the idea of hate He strongly described not a wicked, hostile spirit, but only complete inner severance. In close connexion of thought with His description of the Baptist as the Elijah, who is immediately to precede the setting up of God's kingdom, Jesus says that the time of introductory prophetic preaching reached to the Baptist (Matt. xi. 13); but from this time it is no longer necessary to foretell and await the future realisation of God's kingdom, but to strive with energy to secure one's own share in that kingdom. What Jesus assumes in these words, and even says in them, is plainly that the kingdom of God is no longer, as until John the Baptist, something merely future, but is already a realised fact, and that participation in this realised kingdom falls, not to those who still idly wait for it, nor to those who would earn this blessing for themselves legally by previous merits of their own, but only to those who confidently strive after the salvation offered by God, and take their stand decidedly on the ground of God's kingdom.

In the same way, when the Pharisaic scribes reviled His casting out of devils as itself a diabolical act springing out of Satan's kingdom, whereas His triumph over devils should have convinced them of His superior power, Jesus said to them: "If I cast out devils by the Spirit of God" (Luke xi. 20) it is said "by God's finger," *i.e.* by God's power, "then (*i.e.* already) *the kingdom of God is come to you*" (Matt. xii. 28). And to the Pharisees, who asked Him when the kingdom of God should come, He replied: "The kingdom of God comes not with outward show" (literally, "not with observation," *i.e.* not in a way to be observed, therefore, in meaning, not ostentatiously with pomp): "nor will men say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, *the kingdom of God is in your midst*" (Luke xvii. 20 f.). Luther rendered these last words incorrectly, "the kingdom of God is *within you*," for Jesus did not tell the inquiring Pharisees that the kingdom of God had already found a seat in their hearts, but wished to say to them emphatically that, whereas they ask about the time of the

entrance of this future kingdom, it has already found actual embodiment in their midst. This fact has remained hidden from them, because they fancy the kingdom of God must enter in an ostentatious manner, or must present the marks of sensuous, outward glory, as an earthly, political kingdom has its definite place and definite limits. But it is not so with the true kingdom of God. It comes not and exists not in such outwardly obvious forms. And so now it has already attained existence upon earth in its own simple fashion in the midst of those who are yet ever asking when it is to come hereafter.

In face of these sayings, can we be content with declaring, Jesus is thinking, not of a present realisation of God's kingdom *upon earth*, but of one in the celestial world of spirit-beings, where earthly events find their types or parallels? He means that already the power of *Satan* and his kingdom is broken, but not that the kingdom of God which He expects has already begun in *the world of men*. Yet in reality Jesus says expressly, "*To you is the kingdom of God come; it is in your midst.*" How can this be understood otherwise than of the realising of this kingdom in the world of men? Certainly Jesus sees a significant token of the setting up of God's kingdom in His victory over devils, but over demons so far as they rule and torment *men*. His defeat of diabolical powers is not merely a superhuman prelude or type of the later setting up of God's kingdom in the earthly, human world, but, as a conquest over that which injures men and opposes God's purpose of grace, is an immediate proof that God's kingdom is set up within the world of men.

Thus the fact cannot be explained away that in several sayings Jesus spoke of the present actual realisation of God's kingdom, and indeed of its simple, modest existence and gradual progress upon earth. But of course we must not infer from this that in His thought the idea of God's kingdom simply denoted His "community of disciples," or His "church" upon earth. The idea of the kingdom of God denotes in truth already, taking it in the widest generality, not a mere fellowship of *men with one another*, but a fellowship of *God and men*, or a state in which men stand in peculiar fellowship with God. Exactly stated, it describes, in the thought of Jesus as of His Jewish contemporaries, *the ideal state of blessed fellowship between God and His people, in which the promises of the Old-Testa-*

ment prophets are fulfilled. When therefore Jesus speaks of a present existence of God's kingdom, He means that this promised ideal state of blessedness is already realised in Himself and His disciples so far as they stand in an ideal, blissful fellowship with God. But still not they themselves are the kingdom of God, but this state, this relation with God, in which they stand and enjoy a fulfilment of the promises. *This state of filial relation to God*; this state, which Jesus knew to be already realised in Himself, and which He sought to establish and perfect in His disciples; this state of blissful fellowship of men with their heavenly Father, in which they receive from God nothing but good gifts, such as serve their true welfare and lead to eternal life, and, on the other hand, cleave to Him with childlike confidence and devotion,—Jesus re-

garded as a present, actual existence of the kingdom of God on earth among men, because in it He saw an initial realisation of the Old-Testament promises in regard to the blessedness of the last days. As in the synagogue at Nazareth, He declared that the promise of salvation (Isa. lxi. 1 f.), referring to the last days, is fulfilled "this day" (Luke iv. 17-21); and as in the sayings of the Supper, He regarded the "new covenant" promised by Jeremiah as already established for His disciples, so He could decide in quite general terms that in the blessed state of filial relation between God and men a present fulfilment of the Old-Testament promises concerning the approaching last days (cf. Luke x. 23 f.), and consequently a present existence of the kingdom of God, are given.

Short Expository Papers.

Isaiah lv. 10, 11.

"For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: so shall My word be that goeth forth out of My mouth: it shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it."

THE second of these verses is often quoted as an explanation, or apology, or sort of compensation, when God's word seems to fail in effecting His gracious purposes. Men who are disappointed at its failure in their own hands read into this verse the idea that the purpose of God's word may have been, after all, from what they can see, not beneficent and saving, but the contrary. So they console themselves under failure by saying, as it were under shelter of this verse, that God never really meant His gracious purposes to take effect. Christian men have taken a sort of comfort, even under their non-success, in making the word of God effective for salvation, by—not, perhaps, overlooking their own ineffectiveness, but—saying in a sort of dull despair, as if this verse were their last refuge, that God's word shall not return unto Him void; that it shall accomplish that which He pleases, and shall prosper in the thing whereto He sent it. But all the time they really mean to say

that if God's word fail to accomplish the specific pleasure of His, which He first meant and they first expected, it shall accomplish some other subordinate pleasure of His, which they did not expect; or that if it does not succeed in the gracious ends for which He sent it, it shall succeed in other, ungracious, judicial, punitive purposes which come to Him as an after-thought, on the failure of His first intention. Repeatedly has one come across good people so using this eleventh verse, and making out, to their own satisfaction and comfort, that the non-return of God's word to Him void just means that, when it does not soften and save and bless, it hardens, convicts, and condemns a man. And they think that dire result is the accomplishment of God's pleasure—is prosperity in the thing whereto He has sent His word.

It is true, of course, that where God's word does not save, it condemns. The alternative is sadly, solemnly true. But this is not the truth of these two verses; and to find it there, or to put it in there, is a mischievous perversion of their real meaning. There is no reference in them to God's sovereignty as bent upon getting *something or other* out of the work of His word; or to alternative purposes of His in sending it; or to some unknown, mysterious will of His that is served by the apparent or actual failure of His revealed will; or, indeed, to any judicial, punitive purpose or after-thought of