

The Liberal Movement in Germany.

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I.

The Aims of the Liberals.

M. SABATIER has told us that there exists a party in Catholic France which, under the guidance of French Biblical criticism, is going forward not toward negation, but toward some tremendous affirmations. Such a party now exists, and is carrying on a vigorous propagandism with tongue and pen in Protestant Germany. Led by men like Weinel, Wernle, Trötsch, Bousset, and Niebergall, it is filled with a youthful and buoyant optimism, and is rapidly gaining ground, especially among the cultured classes.

It may be of interest to show the *aims* and the *methods* of this party, and the *influence* which it is exerting on modern German life and literature.

I. Perhaps at no time since the Reformation has there been such keenness of interest in theological questions in Germany. The ecclesiastical atmosphere is charged with electricity. It is universally recognized that a fierce conflict is ahead, which will be no battle about indifferent things, not even a 'Babel Bibel' controversy, but a battle round the 'standard' itself. Was Christ simply the greatest of religious geniuses, or was He God manifest in the flesh? With this question Protestant Germany is face to face to-day, and it is being everywhere discussed, even among the boys in the gymnasiums, and the girls in the boarding-schools.

It would not be incorrect to say that the Church is ranged into two opposing camps—orthodox and liberal,—but a closer view reveals several gradations of opinion.

1. On the extreme right we have the 'Confessionelle Partei,' led by men like Cremer and Nathusius of Greifswald, which consists almost entirely of strict Lutherans, and lays supreme stress on the Lutheran symbols.

2. Next comes the 'Positive Union,' commonly called the 'orthodox' party, which holds fast to the doctrines that are common to the Lutheran and Reformed Churches. Ecclesiastically it is the strongest, as most of the members of the 'Kirchen

Regiment' belong to it, and at present it is using its great influence in the Consistories of the Church to have the door of the ministry closed against the men of liberal views. It is also pressing to have the appointment of professors taken out of the hands of the 'Cultus Minister,' and put into the hands of the 'General Synode' as a means of safeguarding the Church. This party, one of whose protagonists was Kögel, the Court preacher, has sometimes been called, though not by itself, the 'Court Preacher Party.'

3. Next in order we have the 'Landeskirchliche Vereinigung,' which may be regarded as a mediating or 'middle' party. The late Professor Beyschlag was one of its founders. It holds fast by the revelation of God in Christ, and the 'way of salvation' rediscovered through the Reformation; but it stands more on the ground of freedom than the previous, and holds out a hand toward the newer views. It strongly opposes the taking of the election of professors out of the hands of the Cultus Minister, believing him to be more impartial than the General Synode.

4. Next, we come to the 'Liberale Partei,' with which we are to deal in detail; and

5. Last of all, on the extreme left we have the 'Radicale Partei,' which looks to Kalthoff, of Bremen, as its founder, who, to the great disappointment of his followers, died a few months ago. For the 'Radicalen' the person of Jesus has no significance; He is merely a figure, in whom certain religious and, above all, social ideas came to expression, which are of value to mankind. This party is extremely small, and has at present little weight in the Church.

To come now to the 'Liberalen,' as we shall call them, we find that, while they have a unity in aim, they fall into two sections in activity. First, there are those who work on theological lines, and whose object it is to influence the teachers and the preachers. These gather round the standard of the 'Christliche Welt,' call themselves the 'Freunde der Christlichen Welt,' and have their

theological circles in every corner of Germany. Second, there are those whose aim it is, by means of open lectures, pamphlets, etc., to work among the laity, and who are known as the 'Freunde der Evangelischen Freiheit.'

The 'Liberalen' have as yet few representatives in high ecclesiastical seats, in fact, they are aware that the Church would throw them out if she could; but they have obtained a firm hold, through their 'Privatdocenten,' in the Universities. In recent years many young men of liberal views, unable to find admission to the ministry, have established themselves as lecturers in the Universities, and are exercising a powerful influence on the theological students. One is safe in saying that one-half, if not two-thirds, of those leaving the Universities to enter the Church to-day are fast thirled to this party. Even the boarding-houses, supported in University towns by orthodox people for the benefit of orthodox students, are honeycombed with the newer views.

It is unnecessary to give in detail the views which are held and propagated by the 'Liberalen.' They are frankly Unitarian. Jesus was a man, the real child of his parents; he developed, he erred, he shared the views of his day; his so-called 'miracles' are but the language in which one at that time expressed the extraordinary; what was special in him lay in the peculiar power with which he emphasized God, the soul, and our neighbour. A striking feature of the 'Moderne Theologie' is its depreciation of Paul, and the cleft which it discovers between him and Jesus. Paul the theologian misunderstood the mind of the layman Jesus; he carried over into the Christian religion much of the old Jewish theology which Jesus had rejected, and set the thought of the Church on wrong lines, from which it is only now being rescued by the liberal theology. In point of fact, it is nothing less than a new religion that is being proclaimed by the 'Liberalen,'—a 'Jesus Religion' in place of the old Pauline Christianity, in which not merely the doctrine of substitution but the very idea of atonement has no distinctive place. 'The programme of modern theology,' says Niebergall, 'is the religion of personality through the personality of Jesus Christ. Our ideal is the Christian personality. We are of the conviction that our goal, the richness of personal moral life, can only, or at any rate best of all, be reached through a contact with the

personal life of Jesus. We are not to be copies of Jesus, nor even disciples. We are not to seek to be like each other, we are to find our true selves, and for that we believe *Jesus offers a strong help.*' The italics are our own.

The 'Liberalen' look for much from the influence of this new teaching. It will, they believe, bring a revival to the Church, and a spiritual new birth to the German people. So zealous, indeed, are they to win men for their views, that they set it above even the winning of men for Christianity. 'Warmer than the wish,' to quote another representative, 'to win men for the Christian point of view is in us the wish to win believing hearts for the new conception of the gospel, that they may carry the power of their faith over with them into the new time. When this does not take place, they may achieve a personal blessedness; but their faith, unless they can grasp it in the new form, can work no blessing for our German people.'

These young Christians of Germany, however we may regard their views, are in deadly earnest, and they have, moreover, the courage of their convictions. For a man to openly join their ranks is in great measure to close the door of preferment against himself to Church and University. But they accept the sacrifice, and address their would-be followers in the spirit of Gideon. 'Whosoever has fear of his Church,' writes one in a recent book, 'or of a consistorium, or of a dismissal, or of a "case," or of being misunderstood, let him remain away from the work.'

They believe themselves to be the prophets of a new era, they have rediscovered the true original gospel of Jesus, and believe it to be the only gospel that can meet and satisfy the modern mind, and bring the cultured classes back to the Church.

It is a known fact, acknowledged by every German, whatever his sympathies, that there is a wide breach between the Church and the culture of to-day. The proportion of educated laymen who attend Church is very small. This does not by any means imply that they are utterly irreligious, but simply that the Church has ceased to have any place in their lives. They pay their Church taxes with a grudge, but here their interest ends.

Now the 'Liberalen' regard it as their great mission to re-establish the position and influence

of the Church among the people. They wish to remain loyal to her. She is their spiritual mother, and ought, they believe, to have a place for them in her bosom, but they do not hesitate to say that if she refuses to advance, there must come a parting of the ways. 'The time is earnest,' says one, 'if the Evangelical Church does not go forward, because she is too fast rooted in the ground of the sixteenth century, then it must come to a breach.' And not a few are convinced that a breach must come. Certainly some of the events of the past months point in this direction. From the recent cases of Römer and César, which have given rise to so much discussion, we may conclude that the Consistories of the Church are determined on more active opposition to the newer views. In the case of Römer in Remscheid, the Consistorium took action, because of a protest sent up by an orthodox minority in the congregation, and refused to acquiesce in his settlement; but in the still more recent case of César in Dortmund, the Consistorium stepped in and vetoed the election, although it was hearty and unanimous on the part

of the congregation.¹ The 'Liberalen,' on the other hand, are equally determined. The Remscheid congregation refuses to nominate another minister, and so the matter rests. It is clear that these are but the precursors of many similar cases, and a most unhappy state of matters is in prospect. One evil result is that the number of students for the ministry is decreasing (in the last ten years there has been a diminution of over 50 per cent.), and another is that some of the less strong-minded of the students are becoming orthodox, not from conviction, but that they may find more easy access to a church and manse.

Nevertheless, the 'Liberalen' are full of confidence in spite of all discouragements, and with an extraordinary zeal and thoroughness are pressing forward their propaganda.

¹ It has just been announced that the highest Church Court in Prussia (Oberkirchenrat) has confirmed the judgment of the Consistory in the case of César. The Liberalen realize the full meaning of this decision. 'For the pastors of the State Church in Prussia whose sympathies are with the liberal theology,' says the editor of the *Christliche Welt*, 'an earnest hour has arrived.'

Recent Biblical Archaeology.

THE ARK OF JAHWEH.

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ON this interesting subject a whole treatise might still be written, in spite of the lengthy monograph of Martin Dibelius (*Die Lade Jahwes*, Göttingen, 1906) and the supplementary notes of Hermann Gunkel ('Die Lade Jahwes ein Thronstz' in *Ztschr. f. Missionskunde und Religionswissenschaft*, 1906, Sep.-Abdruck, 12 pages), which are well worthy of consideration.

Gunkel begins by recapitulating the reasons adduced by Dibelius for holding that in the earlier times the ark was a throne-seat of Jahweh, without any Divine image, but simply with certain primeval symbols, such as the cherubim. This view is specially in harmony with the solemn designation attached to the ark—'Jahweh Zebaoth, the cherubim-enthroned.' This name recalls the Bab. *asib parakki*, 'he who is enthroned on the most holy,' which was originally an epithet of the god Marduk, but, in virtue of the fact that every king

was regarded as the earthly manifestation of Marduk-Osiris, was used quite generally of secular kings. Jahweh, too, is designated 'King' (cf. Dibelius, p. 58); that this conception was not borrowed from the Canaanites is proved by the numerous West Semitic personal names in which 'king' appears as a predicate of 'deity.'

After Gunkel, here again following Dibelius, has pointed out non-Israelite analogies to such a Divine throne, he returns to the Israelites and insists, no doubt rightly, that the ark goes back to the pre-Canaanite period (which Dibelius had doubted), and was thus an institution of Moses. But he is at one with Dibelius in holding that it was only by a *later transformation* that the ark became a receptacle for the tables of the Law. Gunkel thinks, moreover, that the cherubim had their place originally not *upon* the ark, but *beneath* at the side as 'throne-bearers,' like the two lions,