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ARTICLE X.

NOTES ON BRITISH THEOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY.

It is a pleasure to commend to the notice of readers of the Bibliotheca Sacra the two volumes just issued, on the Gifford Foundation, by Professor Edward Caird, LL.D., D.C.L., D.Litt., Master of Balliol College, Oxford. They are the last terms in the series that forms a brilliant record of work done in Kant, Hegel, Comte, and other philosophical representatives. The distinguished firm of publishers, Messrs. Maclehose and Sons, of Glasgow, have done for the volumes, in type and finish, all that publishers could do. The volumes are marked by all those excellences of style and thought which have made Dr. Caird the superb lecturer he has ever been—so superb that it does not appear we in Scotland shall soon see his like again.

There are two ways in which we may estimate this work. One is as a contribution on the Gifford foundation, and the other is, as a general contribution to religious and philosophical thought. Now, in the latter, and fortunately the more important, aspect, the work seems to me to rank much higher than in the other view. For it is obviously a somewhat circuitous and indirect mode of approaching the problems of natural theology, to reach them through an exposition of early Greek philosophies. But, on the wider view, such a work has so great value in itself as a contribution to the subject of which it treats, that it can scarcely be too highly praised. That subject is, "The Evolution of Theology in the Greek Philosophers."[1] The opening chapter is on "the relation of religion to theology," and has an exceedingly fresh and well-

[1] Two vols. Pp. xvii, 382 and xi, 377. Glasgow: James Maclehose and Sons, publishers to the University. 14s., *net*.

balanced statement of the relations of reason and faith. I am so heartily in accord with what the gifted author says that only with reluctance do I enter upon criticism. Yet no statement on such a theme can hope to win universal assent, and criticism is the greatest compliment we can pay to its value.

The contention of the Master of Balliol is that the opposition so often existent between faith and reason can only be relative—not absolute—and must more and more disappear, as each comes to its own in fully developed spiritual life. He proposes (vol. i. pp. 18–20) no more new or striking idea than that of evolution—the usual catchword of our time—as an eirenicon in the hope of bringing both terms to better mutual understanding. As to his main contention, enlightened theologians have long been agreed upon it, and do not regard the opposition of faith and reason as more or other than accidental. Dr. Caird says there is "no third power beyond both" to determine them, and that is, no doubt, true, although it leaves the matter in somewhat loose and indiscriminate form: there are theologians who discriminate the *spiritual* reason from the *natural* reason, the dialectic process in the former not being divorced from ethical conditions. The same laws of thought are, no doubt, valid for both, but it is reason as regenerate and spiritually enlightened that is held to surmount the oppositions between faith and reason.

As to the proposed eirenicon, I venture to think it not without its disadvantages, and hardly feel prepared to rate it so highly as our author does. The reconciliation of faith and reason is sought to be effected within the more or less discordant spiritual subject, and the idea of evolution—which, as a result of modern science, is certain to be conceived as very largely exterior to that subject—will be very apt to make the reconciliation sought too much in what lies beyond ourselves. It seems to me that a truer eirenicon lies much nearer, and is found in the progressive and symmetrical development of the rational *and*—I do not write "or"—spiritual life of the subject. There may, no doubt, be an exterior aspect which the

term Evolution covers, but it seems to be undesirably overweighted in value when the subject's attention is drawn off so largely to exterior aspects. I am by no means sure that the author does not unwittingly make the opposition between reason and faith, which he means to heal, at times appear greater than it is. He leaves the impression that faith is mainly a passive and unreflective thing—the "unreflecting faith" of religion, as it is later (vol. i. p. 380) termed—which must "develop into reason," whose "criticism" is "directed against" it. A deeper spiritual analysis would show how unsatisfactory such a presentation is. We had thought the day was past when any would treat faith, like Mansel and others, as though it were only unreflective or receptive, and not also constructive.

But perhaps philosophy is lagging at one point behind theology. The one and only faint trace of any better view (foot of p. 19, vol i.) is quite overborne by the whole trend and tendency of the discussion, which does no manner of justice to the rational character of faith in its developed reaches. It is entirely overlooked by the author that the whole function of reason is not correctly represented when it is set forth as a coming after faith to "criticise" it. Reason must also go *before* faith and justify its confidence, by showing how rational are the grounds of such confidence. Faith is faith—faith believes—just because it is seen to be more rational to believe than not to believe. Faith does not "develop into reason," but into perfect harmony with reason. It is not only that faith and reason are not absolutely opposed—as Dr. Caird rightly contends—but that they are not so separate and independent as he represents. This prior and justifying assent of reason, in faith's most living forms, strangely enters not within Dr. Caird's purview. As we have seen faith, in its more developed workings, to be so highly charged with rationality, so it should be seen reason involves an ultimate element of faith. If faith is to "develop into reason," we should need to preserve the balance by calling in Pascal's saying that faith is "the last step of reason." For it may, with not less cogency and truth,

be shown that faith is itself the highest reason—reason sublimed—the crown of our intellectual activity. But there is really no need to put it either way.

Another point. We are, of course, in perfect accord with the author's insistences on the "universal" character of Christianity, the "kernel" of which "is essentially rational," and on the need "to break away from the local and national influences of the region in which it was born." But, in the principle of dropping what was local and accidental, we have something which, in the hands of some who occupy Dr. Caird's reflective standpoint, would carry us so far that it had been better for Dr. Caird to show the principle at work. But he merely says, "I will not conceal my conviction that its dissolving power must be fatal to many things which men have thought and still think to be bound up with their religious life, but I do not believe that it will destroy anything that is really necessary to it." Such reserve, however prudent or permissible, can hardly be satisfying to his readers. In less reserved—or more courageous—writers of the same school, we have before now had the Incarnation, Death, and Resurrection of our Lord, dropped or dismissed as historic fact, while their ideas were retained. Are such facts among those meant to be treated as "local," "temporary," "provisional," and without "universal" relation or cosmic significance? The Master of Balliol expressly recognizes the difficulties of such an intellectualized Christianity, with its projection of ideas *minus* a basework of historic fact, but it cannot be said that the help he gives is great.

There is, in fact, no real facing of the difficulty, and we are left to conclude that the tossings betwixt idea and history are to be obviated by taking history *as* idea for our mediating thought. Now, the services of writers like Professor Caird towards a spiritual interpretation of the universe are so great —so inestimably great—that it is real pity they cannot be brought to see how greatly they sin against events and against the needs of humanity in treating historic fact as the mere

husk of thought. Guarantee for the continuance of spiritual idea is gone when it is no longer wedded to actual or historic fact, in the light of which the idea is understood, and by the presence of which the idea is continually nourished and enriched. This idealistic sacrifice of history—which Dr. Caird suggests and implies rather than illustrates—is a two-edged defect—religious and philosophic—of the school to which he belongs, and is a mode of thinking doomed to transiency before the inherent strength and richness of fact, and the temper of historic justice so characteristic of our time.

Dr. Caird finely insists that philosophy shall not be severed from life, but then religious life has always been nourished at the fountains of fact, and if the facts are spirited away, what sort of life will there be to criticise? Philosophy will be, in Dr. Caird's words, "smitten with barrenness." Of course, the thinker will always make, for his own purposes, a large and legitimate abstraction of ideas, for he is concerned with pure truth rather than its forms; but that is not to admit the wisdom or the power of reflection *away from* the facts, rather than *upon* the facts, until their meaning is seen down to its deepest crystalline depths. May we not say there is defective apprehension of the real case for Christianity, if the true unity and mutual interpenetration of absolute ideality and historic reality are not grasped? If it is the absolute religion, the God-man is no contingent being, but One in whom absolute ideality is so given to us. If we reduced it to a religion of mere ideas, this would show we had not apprehended what is really involved in it as the absolute religion. He is no mere—and transient—Redeemer; He is *Christus Consummator.* Despite these critical reflections, there is a great deal in this admirably written chapter with which one can heartily agree, and which one must cordially admire.

The second chapter deals with the evolution of theology, and after insisting on the principle of unity as that which is most fundamental in all religions, proceeds to deal with theology as having its beginning in ancient Greece. What the author

says of the underlying principle or originative power, we like better than any previous statement he has given us. The only exception that could be taken by any would be, that the emphasis on the abstract principle of unity is so great that we have to suppose for ourselves that the God, who is this principle of unity, is also a self-conscious, self-determining Being, which is, of course, meant to be understood. The rest of the chapter is excellent, the whole being very clear and fine. The chapter which follows, on "the precursors of Plato," is altogether admirable, and will charm the philosophic reader. Through six succeeding chapters he will tread the paths of Platonic idealism under the firm and sure-footed guidance of a master, who is all through at his best.

Chapter the tenth treats of "the transition from Plato to Aristotle," and is very good. Four chapters on Aristotle follow, and the great Stagirite is handled with the same sympathy, discrimination, and luminous power, that marked the treatment of Plato. Interesting and suggestive are the discussions on pure and practical reason, and on the primacy of reason or of will. In the course of the latter, it is said (vol i. p. 381) that "it is an imperfect religion which withdraws itself from any of the concrete interests of life," and that "it is an imperfect philosophy which finds the highest truth in a pure contemplation, which confines itself to the most general ideas, and throws no new light upon the result of natural or ethical science." But now, what becomes of the self-consistency of Dr. Caird's thinking? Have we not already seen that it is precisely such a drawing off, "by the way of abstraction," in the case of Christianity, from the "concrete interests of life" as religious which he claims and counsels? This, of course, since the religious life is based upon, and busied with, the "concrete" facts of historic Christianity. Was it, then, judged by this—his own—standard, an "imperfect" philosophy he was earlier giving us, when he was finding "the highest truth in a pure contemplation" of the ideas of Christianity—its "most general ideas"—with "no new light" to cast upon particular

facts or results? The last of these chapters on Aristotle has taken us into the second volume, which pursues through many chapters the post-Aristotelian philosophies, especially Stoicism, and the teachings of Philo and Plotinus.

The discussion of Stoicism is marked by the same sympathetic discrimination and fine philosophic justice which have marked these lectures all through. The treatment of Plotinus seems more discursive, and in some respects less successful, than the handling of Stoicism. In both cases interest is heightened by the discussion being carried on within select and somewhat narrow lines, within which essential principles are firmly grasped and finely presented. There is, however, the consequent effect that one feels some sense of loss of the fullness and richness of the systems. The chapter on "Plotinus and the Gnostics" is concerned with his antagonism to the dualistic position of the Gnostics as to evil, which Plotinus opposed as far as his optimism would allow.

The last chapter of all is occupied with "the influence of Greek philosophy upon Christian Theology." The opening part of the chapter is a statement—and an imperfect one—rather of the influence of Christian theology upon the conceptions of Greek philosophy. Then we come to a reference to the influence of the Logos idea of Philo on the Jewish Church. This is followed by a somewhat discursive treatment of the doctrinal discussions of the early Christian centuries. At length (vol. ii. p. 363) we are reminded that Greek philosophy supplied the form of reflective thought, its intellectual weapons and categories, and was a form profoundly dualistic. Also, that through the Gnostics and the Alexandrian School, the ideas of neo-Platonism became impressed on Christian theology, emphasizing always the negative rather than the positive elements of Christianity. "Its central idea of the unity of the human with the Divine" was not lost, but it was "driven back to its last entrenchment in the consciousness of Christ."

Next, it is maintained that the same breach between the unity of the human and the Divine took place with respect to the

doctrine of the Trinity. Thus, it is said the dualistic tendency of Christian development was due to neo-Platonic influences, which yet could not yield a solution. And we are shown that this negative dualistic influence of neo-Platonism was "a very useful office."

To any one conversant with recent discussions, the results of these brilliant and suggestive lectures, as presented in this chapter, must seem a very disappointing close. There is lack of depth and thoroughness, and there is the very fault which the Master of Balliol is never weary of contending against—there is taken a too external and mechanical view of the whole matter. One may very well grant the need and motive which Christianity had in common with these Greek philosophic systems. One may grant the influence of Greek forms of thought on early Christian theology, but what one looks for is some scholarly and thoughtful determination of the precise character and real extent of that influence, and especially how far Greek influences carried early writings or documents beyond being intellectual equivalents of Christian thought—even unto being additions upon the same. It cannot be pretended there is such a discussion here. What our author fails to appreciate —and his fine chapter on Philo makes the failure more surprising—is, that the unique triumph of Christian speculative genius was to make the Logos no more external and subordinate, but an immanent personal principle in the very nature of the Absolute Being. The Logos principle was incarnated in the personality of Jesus. The discovery made by Christian reflection was that reason is rooted in personality. Personality was seen to be an immanent category of the Divine Logos or Primal Being. The unity of the Divine Spirit and the human is thus from the outset assured, and is due to the Logos being the immanent principle of the soul of man. But, of course, it was imperfectly apprehended, and had to fight against the dualistic influences which Dr. Caird so well describes.

The Logos principle is thus the ideal principle that over-

comes the dualism of actual life. It makes a knowledge of the Absolute possible. It gives rational mediation to the world-process. Through the ideal Mediator, in Whom it centers, a sinful race is ushered upon a spiritual life destined to be infinite. The emanational and mediational features of later Greek speculation significantly wore a quasi-personal aspect, which makes it the more important to realize the significance, in the new Christianity, of the category of personality. Of course, earlier impersonal and abstract elements could still less yield advance. This importance of the Divine Word or Logos is felt in theological reflection from Justin onwards, so that from this time the eternal immanent self-evolution of the Logos comes into view and prominence, and does not evince in history such easy yielding to Greek ideas of dualism as Dr. Caird assumes and asserts. Sympathetic as men like Clement and Origen were towards Greek philosophy, it is not easy to find in their writings that it had at all so extreme effect on them as Dr. Caird represents. It seems strange, too, that never does Dr. Caird make any determination of differences in the Johannine conception of the Logos from its connotation in the speculations of Philo. These remarks must close with the observation that there is paucity of proved result and want of real impact about this closing chapter which make it perhaps, the least satisfactory in these two volumes.

Of the volumes taken in whole, however, one may take leave to doubt whether the mature learning and ripe reflection of the Master of Balliol have ever given us any more valuable or inspiring piece of work than that which lies embedded in these most delightful volumes.

Kilmarnock, Scotland. JAMES LINDSAY.