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The Liberal Movement in Germany.

BY THE REV. JOHN MACCONNACHIE, M.A., UDDINGSTON.

III.

The Influence of the Liberals.

WHAT NOW of the *influence* which the liberal theology up to the present has been able to exert on German life and literature? It is always difficult to estimate the influence of a movement which is in progress, but so far as one can judge it has been very considerable. It has fallen on a fortunate time. The materialism of the seventies and eighties of last century has given way before a new idealism which in the last years has swept over Germany. The present mood in Germany, while not pronouncedly Christian, is distinctly religious. The Church may have fallen into disrepute, and Christianity as an authoritative religion may have lost something of its power, but a new need for religion has been awakened, an inquiring spirit is abroad moving on the face of the waters, and many are turning to the liberal theologians for guidance.

While the effect of the modern theology has been to bring trouble and division among the Churches, it has been without doubt the means of drawing some back to a Christian point of view, if not back to the Church. In many of the gymnasiums also it has a beneficial effect. A year or two ago, for a young man to confess himself a Christian was to expose himself to the ridicule of his fellows. He might be an agnostic, a materialist, a *Buddhist* if he cared, but not a Christian. But in gymnasiums where the religious teacher represents the modern standpoint, a more respectful and even believing spirit has come to prevail.

A very decided change also is being effected by the 'Liberalen' on much of the modern preaching. No one, whatever his views may be, will deny that a change in the character of German preaching was needful. It was not attractive. It moved within a narrow circle of religious ideas, and seldom came into touch with life. But now a new school of Homiletics has arisen, whose motto is 'Hinein ins Leben,' 'Greif nur hinein ins volle Menschenleben.' As examples, we might mention Niebergall's *Wie predigen wir dem modernen Menschen*, and Baumgarten's

Predigt Probleme. The truths they emphasize are not so new to us as they are to Germans, accustomed as they have been to their dry-as-dust treatises on Homiletics. Baumgarten, indeed, pays a special compliment to English and American preachers, and claims to be the disciple of F. W. Robertson and F. G. Peabody, two names that are loved and esteemed among the 'Liberalen' in Germany.

The truth on which most stress is being laid in modern homiletics, is that the preacher must understand not only his message, but the people to whom he is to address it. The special character and peculiarities, as well as the religious conceptions of the people, in different parts of the land, must be carefully studied and tabulated. A new science, indeed, has come into being in recent years known as 'Religions Volkskunde,' and elaborate books are being written dealing with the different provinces of Germany from this point of view. Men like Niebergall are lecturing upon it in the Universities, and the magazine known as the *Monatschrift für die Kirchliche Praxis* makes it one of the chief objects of its study. Their great model in this respect is Bitzjus, the Swiss preacher of Twann, whose sermons, published after his death, have attained a reputation in Germany and Switzerland almost like that of F. W. Robertson among ourselves. The influence of this teaching is distinctly felt in the newer sermons. One need only take up a book like Dörries' *Evangelium der Armen*, and compare it with a volume of Gerok's sermons. Gerok could be preached in many pulpits of the land, and, if all reports are true, often has been, even by Catholics; but Dörries' sermons are so coloured with the special needs and characteristics of the congregation before him, that they could be preached in no other place than where they were preached, in a working-class suburb of Hanover.

There is no doubt that this new type of preaching is proving attractive to the people, for even those who are not prepared to accept their views

prefer the preaching of the 'Liberalen.' It differs from the old life of preaching to a degree which one can hardly conceive; it is not only different in doctrine and in form, it is different even in delivery, and one has no difficulty in telling to which school a man belongs, from the hearing of a single sermon.

Did space permit one might trace the influence of the new theology on that wide field of literature lying between the sermon and the essay, represented by such men as Wimmer and Bonus, an example of which we have in a translated volume of Wimmer's *My Search for Light*; but, passing from this, we shall now briefly glance at the influence of the 'Liberalen' in the domain of belles-lettres.

Two writers meet us on the threshold, each of whom is imbued with the anxious seeking spirit of the time, and is trying to guide his fellows in their emergence from the enslavement of natural science into a new age of religion. We refer to Peter Rosegger and Gustav Frenssen, the two most popular and influential writers in Germany to-day. Rosegger does not greatly concern us here, he is a Roman Catholic, although had he not been so distinguished a Catholic, he would long since have been excommunicated from his Church. His recent book, *J.N.R.I.*, to his great disappointment, we understand, has not met with the reception he had looked for. It has been severely handled both from the Protestant and Catholic side, but he clings to it with all the strength of his nature, as his contribution to the needs of his day, and he has now sent it out in a cheap edition to the people. To the Catholic his Christ is too modern, and to the modern man too Catholic, but it is a notable book nevertheless, and shows the extent to which the modern spirit is permeating Roman Catholicism.

But we now come to Frenssen, whose name on account of his latest book, *Hilligenlei*, has been for the last year in every mouth. The son of a carpenter, he was, up to a year or two ago, a Lutheran pastor in the neighbourhood of Hamburg. After several early attempts, he caught the public ear some few years ago, by the publication of *Jörn Uhl*, which made his name a household word in Germany. Following upon this, came three volumes of *Dorfpredigten*, which still further enhanced his reputation, and were read in thousands of non-churchgoing homes. Soon after, feeling

that his views were become too broad for the Church, he retired from the ministry, and for two years was silent. Then about a year ago came *Hilligenlei* (dialect for Heiliges Land), which has been the most talked-of book in Germany for many a day. It is doubtful if any book has made so much stir and noise since the publication of Renan's *Life of Christ*. For months after its appearance, one could hardly enter a train without finding it in somebody's hands, and a flood of controversial literature has poured from the press, which has left the 'Bibel Babel' controversy far behind.

The feature of this book which has occasioned the greatest sensation is a 'Life of Christ' which it incorporates, represented to be written by the hero of the work, but actually, as he informs us in an 'afterword,' embodying his own conception of the Saviour, reached after years of strenuous reading in the works of those 'brave' German scholars, as he calls them, who have made this their special study. The book is entitled *Hilligenlei*, or 'Holy Land,' and is an earnest attempt on the part of the writer to point a way out of the present troubles and perplexities into a holier land. The Church has lost its power, her teaching no longer makes any appeal to the people. The two branches of the Church stand, to use his own simile, like two old market-women beside their broken carts, crying and scolding after the crowd which goes past unheeding. He wishes to do something for his time, and this book is his contribution. In the 'Life of Christ,' as now represented by modern theology, he believes that the age will find that 'heiliges land' which it is seeking for, and which, if accepted, will bring a new spiritual birth to the German people.

We cannot enter with any detail into Frenssen's picture of Jesus. Its most characteristic feature is, that for once, in the frankest manner, the simple humanity of Jesus is proclaimed; he appears completely dependent on the conditions which operate in the development of every man, he remains circumscribed within the narrow horizon of his people, and no supernatural knowledge enables him to rise above the mistaken ideas of his age. His one peculiar possession, which has given him a world significance, and which fits him to-day to be our Saviour, was his deep all-ruling consciousness of fellowship with God, his faith in the divine dignity of man, and his belief in the

great goal of human development, the kingdom of God. In Frenssen the 'Liberalen' have discovered a most valuable coadjutor. It is hardly possible to exaggerate the influence which this book is having in Germany. It means that, in the next years, the spirit of the modern theology will knock at the doors of half a million of educated men and women, a result never to be looked for from all the other efforts of the 'Liberalen' put together. Nevertheless, this self-appointed interpreter has caused the 'Liberalen' no small anxiety. They accept him as one of themselves, they share also his conviction that the life of the Saviour, according to modern research, is *Hilligenlei*, and alone is fitted to bring a spiritual new birth to the German people; but they are not prepared altogether to accept his life of Christ as a true representation of the views of modern theology, and from other views expressed in the book they heartily dissent. But they welcome him among their number nevertheless, and look for much from his assistance.

So far we have sought to play the part of spectator, and have aimed at giving a just account of this intensely interesting modern movement.

A word or two of criticism may be offered in conclusion.

We must all acknowledge the high ideal of the 'Liberalen,' their earnestness of purpose to bring the spiritual life of the present again under the influence of the gospel, and to lay the foundation of a German new birth. We agree with them that some change is necessary in the old forms of theology, if they are to meet and satisfy the modern mind. And perhaps we shall also grant that in the present age of seeking and unrest among the people, and indifference toward the Church, they are helping to turn the minds of their countrymen back to the gospel, from which, as presented by the Church, they had so resolutely turned away. In so far they are rendering a service to Germany, and, it may be, to other lands.

But there are several things which militate against this modern presentation of the gospel constituting that new epoch in Christianity which the 'Liberalen' so confidently expect.

1. The first is their subjectivity as historians. Their account of New Testament history is through and through permeated and prejudiced with the

'moderne Weltanschauung.' They cannot forget that they are modern men, interpreting the gospel to modern minds, and their history is not so much history as it was, as history as it appears to be, through the spectacles and with the presuppositions of the modern man. They claim with the utmost confidence to be able to separate the permanent from the transitory, the kernel from the husk, and the husk, of course, is always that which does not accord with the modern mind. This is especially the case with regard to the supernatural elements in the life of Jesus; nothing can be allowed as of any consequence which cannot be brought into line with the modern view of the world, and the demands of natural law. All this, it will be seen, makes for a subjectivity, often unconscious, in their interpretation of the history.

2. The second is their depreciation of Paul, and the cleft which they discover between the gospel of Jesus and apostolic teaching. The gospel of the crucified and risen Christ is not a mere Pauline addition and misinterpretation, as they suppose, but was the earliest form of apostolic preaching. This so-called 'Jesus religion,' or 'Christianity of Christ,' is a discovery of modern days; the only Christianity of which history knows is that whose object from the beginning has been Jesus Christ, and whose divinely sent apostle, without whom it never would have become a world religion, was Paul. The *πρῶτον ψεῦδος* of the modern view, says Kaftan in his recent brochure, *Jesus und Paulus*, is this attempt to separate between Paul and Jesus. The greatest hours in the spiritual history of Christianity, he adds, have been those in which Paul became again a living power in the Church, and it is not likely that to-day a new epoch will be introduced through exactly the opposite, the relegating of Paul to the lumber-room of theology.

3. The last thing we mention as militating against the new teaching becoming that living power in Germany for which its exponents hope, is that it has no place for the Cross. The idea of atonement is put in the circumference, if not altogether outside the circle, of their thinking. Self-realization with the help of Jesus Christ is a somewhat anæmic gospel, and has nothing in it of that great motive power, the sense of debt to Christ, which has been throbbing at the heart of Christianity since Pentecost. This new conception of the gospel, which makes our Lord the first

Christian and no more, is true neither to His own teaching nor to the apostolic witness; and though it may serve a temporary purpose in Germany to-day, it never can become the permanent form of an effective and soul-saving Christianity. 'The

Atonement,' as Dr. Denney says, 'is the pre-supposition of Christian ethics, as it is the inspiring and controlling force in Christian life. Nothing can beget in the soul that life, except the appeal of the Cross.'

Literature.

THE EVOLUTION OF CULTURE.

THE EVOLUTION OF CULTURE AND OTHER ESSAYS. By the late Lieutenant-General A. Lane-Fox Pitt-Rivers, D.C.L., F.R.S., F.S.A. Edited by J. L. Myres, M.A., Student of Christ Church, Oxford. With an Introduction by Henry Balfour, M.A., Fellow of Exeter College, Oxford, Curator of the Pitt-Rivers Museum. (*Clarendon Press*. 7s. 6d. net.)

THE late General Pitt-Rivers was greatest as a collector and classifier of antiquities (we do not touch his generalship here), but he could write. After his death, Mr. J. L. Myres of Oxford collected a volume of essays which he had contributed to journals or read at the meetings of societies.

The essay which gives the volume its title is of most general interest, although it is neither so long, nor so great a contribution to its subject, as that on 'Primitive Warfare,' which consists, indeed, of three different lectures, delivered at the Royal United Service Institution in 1867, 1868, and 1869, and afterwards published in the journal of that institution. Besides these, there is an essay on 'Early Modes of Navigation,' and one on those principles of classification which Pitt-Rivers adopted, and had to fight for, when he first became known as a scientific collector of antiquities.

The value of the essay on 'The Evolution of Culture,' to which we shall confine ourselves now, lies in the combination of accurate observation and far-seeing generalization. It is curious, and almost pathetic, to find him at the outset under the necessity of opposing the dictum that 'physical science deals with the work of God, historical science with the works of man.' Professor Max Müller, from whom he quotes it, had a strong desire to speak to a wide circle of hearers, and the dictum is perhaps a popular concession which Max Müller himself slowly carried his hearers out of

General Pitt-Rivers will have none of it. History and physical science are equally the results of evolution. If God is behind, He is behind them both. But we have to do, says Pitt-Rivers, with these things as they are, not with God, who may be behind them; and it was necessary for him to take up this attitude, because in those days God was introduced for the purpose of barring progress, and, if possible, even excluding investigation. We must therefore clearly distinguish between the professional agnosticism of an anti-Christian philosopher and the scientific absorption of a Darwin or a Pitt-Rivers. Pitt-Rivers seeks to show the steps by which man has passed from stage to stage in his long-drawn-out career of progress in things material. He leaves the unseen and the spiritual to others.

So accomplished an anthropologist as Mr. J. L. Myres was sure to do everything that could be done in the verification of every detail, and in the bringing of the essays up to date. We may therefore depend upon the book for accuracy.

THE BACK OF THE BLACK MAN'S MIND.

AT THE BACK OF THE BLACK MAN'S MIND; or, Notes on the Kingly Office in West Africa. By R. E. Dennett. (*Macmillan*. 10s. net.)

It is the desire and the despair of every student of ethnic religion to get to the back of the black man's mind. In giving this title to his book, Mr. Dennett says: 'I rather wish to imply that I should like to get there than to assert that I have actually solved all the problems that lie concealed there.' He has, at any rate, gone the right way about it. He has lived with the black man, and exchanged confidences. He has endured endless palavers. He has despised him not. By his contributions to