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Modern Positive Theology.

BY THE REV. JOHN DICKIE, M.A., TARLAND, ABERDEENSHIRE.

IV.

Conclusion.

SUCH then are the main interests of the Modern Positive Theology, as of Christian Theology in general in our day—the question of the authority of Scripture and of Ecclesiastical Dogma, and the doctrine of Christ's Person and Work. The leaders of the movement approach these great problems with due appreciation of the issues involved, and in a spirit at once candid and reverent, which cannot but command the respectful attention of every serious religious thinker. We must also sympathize with the desire to make the 'Old Faith' intelligible to the 'modern man' in spite of all extravagance like Grützmacher's in the delineation of him, 'a species of idolatry' which draws from Kaftan the just protest, 'Truth asks no one whether she is to his liking or not. Every one has to bow the knee to her, the modern man as well as the ancient.'

But what is there of originality in these positions? How far is there gain for us, either intellectually or religiously? It goes without saying that Theo. Kaftan and Seeberg are not the first Christian thinkers who have tried to present the Old Faith in a new light. The abiding problem of Theology is just to mediate between the eternal gospel and the mutations of human knowledge and opinion, with perfect justice to both. Of this the Modern Positive Theologians are fully aware. They tell us that problems and solutions are continually shaping themselves anew. 'The Hellenisation of the Gospel was in its day a necessary modernising process.' Kaftan says that as a matter of fact all theology, that is, *real* theology, is modern, only more or less; and that he is simply attempting to do what Augustine and the other great theologians of history did for their own time. Quite so, only the heretics were making the same attempt, and both were assured that their thinking was timeless. The conscious recognition of the relativity of theology is distinctively modern. Yet it is not new in principle even in Positive circles. Kaftan's Erlangen Professor, Hofmann, spoke in words

almost identical with his of 'a new method of teaching Old Truth.' Both Hofmann and Seeberg's teacher, Frank, would have regarded themselves as *Modern* Positive Theologians, in contradistinction from mere traditionalists like Philippi, though standing much nearer the tradition than Theo. Kaftan or even Seeberg. There is nothing new about the idea of a 'Modern Positive Theology,' or a 'Modern Theology of the Old Faith,' though the names are new.

Theo. Kaftan is very difficult to classify. He claims to be 'a Confessional Lutheran, and not a follower of Schleiermacher,' but the influence of the theological movement inaugurated by Schleiermacher is at least as much in evidence as the Confessional Lutheranism. He is a Kantian in philosophy, like R. A. Lipsius and Ritschl. But theologically his instincts are more conservative than theirs, though he is decidedly the freest and most independent of the Modern Positive group. Like many others, he sees that nearly all the intellectual interest and enthusiasm are on the so-called 'modern' side, while the practical work of the Church both at home and abroad is almost entirely left to the religious zeal and earnestness of those least affected by the modern spirit. But is modern theology necessarily fatal to Christian activity? Is practical Christianity indissolubly wedded to a theology which no longer commands the assent of the intelligent and intellectually active? Such is the problem as it presents itself to him. He has too much faith both in human intelligence and Christianity to answer either question in the affirmative. As things are at present, there is strength and weakness on both sides. But cannot we have the strength of both, without the weakness of either? Surely that would be the natural combination—a modern theology without the paralyzing weakness that comes of mere negation, a theology enshrining the old historic faith of Christendom in its power and fulness. This theology will submit to no merely external authority; will be conscious

of its own limitations; will welcome all knowledge of reality, and will in consequence be on good terms with exact science, though the science of history is the only science in which theology has a vital interest. In its broad outlines this programme cannot but meet with general acceptance. Its most questionable features are just where it comes nearest the old Ritschlian position, as in the rejection of metaphysics—perhaps the chief point of contrast between Kaftan and Seeberg. Theology must of course welcome all pertinent facts from whatever source. But is its interest in history different in kind from its interest in other sciences? Is it not interested in them all alike, chiefly in their *metaphysical*, or in what Lipsius called their *teleologico-religious* ('religiös-teleologisch') bearings? Kaftan's work bears throughout the impress of a fresh and original mind. But in spite of its value as a general statement of principles, a 'modern' theologian will find nothing new in it.

A 'positive' theologian, on the other hand, will learn how and upon what grounds, in his opinion, 'the Old Faith' with which 'Christianity stands or falls,' demands a 'Modern Theology.' Perhaps its chief service consists in the emphasis with which it asserts that there are some things which Christianity cannot concede to the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*, without losing its own identity. But I do not know that it marks any substantial advance in the determination of these things.

In an 'Author's Preface' to the English translation of his *Grundwahrheiten*, published since the commencement of these articles, Seeberg claims that 'theologically educated readers will easily discover the framework of a new Dogmatic System.' Is this claim justified? I scarcely think so. Seeberg's Dogmatic System is just that associated, for two generations now, with his old University of Erlangen, modernized in some particulars. It is the theology of Hofmann and Frank modified by the freer attitude to Scripture and Ecclesiastical Dogma which I have already described, and with a more real sense of what the Christian consciousness can vouch for, and what it cannot. But here again the difference is relative. Frank found fault with Hofmann for making the Christian consciousness responsible for too many of the details of Scripture and Dogma; Seeberg raises the same objection against Frank himself. Seeberg has distinguished more precisely than his precursors between what is given immediately in Christian experience, and

the dogma which follows therefrom by way of inference. He has likewise recognized more fully than they that there is much in the Bible which does not belong to the substance of religious faith. He is more alive to the relativity of dogma, and to the historical conditions by which it was partly shaped. These are 'modern' elements in his theology. But they are already fully recognized in 'modern' circles, nor are they built together with the 'positive' elements valued by him into a single harmonious whole, so that each part is necessary to the others. The framework is not new, and the materials built into it are new only in their present connexion.

The Erlangen Theology seems to me capable of far greater things than it has yet achieved. 'What am I, and what do I believe, as a Christian, and upon what grounds?' If theology were to investigate these questions as earnestly, as thoroughly, and as critically, as philosophy does the elements of self-consciousness, I am convinced that we should receive great gain therefrom. Further, Seeberg's work is a development of that theology along what I regard as fruitful lines in a natural direction. But he has not given us 'the framework of a new Dogmatic system.' The elements which he brings together are not new, nor is the principle of their organization.

Seeberg was brought up in the orthodox Lutheran faith, and has experienced no intellectual or religious cataclysm. His present positions, so far as they are different from those of his early manhood, are the result of a gradual and imperceptible change; and he doubtless feels himself a better and not a worse Lutheran in consequence. He has, or had, the full confidence of the vast body of average conservative theological opinion in Germany. Schian says: 'He can ill be spared, the brilliant lecturer, the admirable stylist, the cultured writer, the accomplished theologian.' But we are more concerned to note that with his antecedents and associates he is prepared to go so far, and that he is so generally regarded as a 'safe' guide. The reception accorded his *Grundwahrheiten* is an indication of how general such an attitude to Scripture and Dogma is becoming even in 'positive' circles. Far more important than his work as head of the Modern Positive School is his valuable *Text-Book of the History of Dogma*, where he seeks to mediate between the Ritschlian tendency to depreciate Dogma, and the disposition among

Conservative Theologians to regard it as inviolable.

So far as I can judge, the ablest of the younger men is Beth, who occupies the chair in Vienna to which Lipsius went in 1861, and who may yet advance as far beyond the positions of his teacher

as Lipsius did after that date. Grützmacher, on the other hand, in spite of his industry, is too violent and too self-satisfied for a responsible theologian. But if one may judge from their present performances, it may be questioned whether the group has distinctiveness enough to hang together as a school.

Literature.

MOULTON'S NEW TESTAMENT GRAMMAR.

GRAMMAR OF NEW TESTAMENT GREEK.
By J. H. Moulton, M.A., D.Lit. Vol. i.
Prolegomena. Third Edition. (*T. & T. Clark.* 8s. net.)

WHEN the first edition of Professor Moulton's *Prolegomena* appeared, the present writer had an opportunity of discussing it with Dr. Deissmann. And he can recall how, after freely extolling its merits in the generous terms he has so frequently employed since, the famous German Professor concluded, 'And certainly Moulton is not *langweilig* ("wearisome").' The justice of this remark will be at once conceded. Grammars are not as a rule enlivening reading, but Dr. Moulton has succeeded in imparting to his pages so many brilliant suggestions and fresh and humorous touches, that it is not to be wondered at that these, combined with the book's well-known more solid qualities, have succeeded in sending it into a third edition within three years of its publication.

To the outstanding merits of the work it is unnecessary to recur: they have already had full justice done to them in the pages of this magazine (vol. xvii. p. 450 ff.) by so competent an authority on the language of the Greek New Testament as Professor H. A. A. Kennedy of Toronto. All that is required in the present instance is to draw attention to the fact that Dr. Moulton has taken advantage of this new edition to make a large number of changes and additions (for the convenience of the possessor of the earlier editions these are detailed on p. xv of the new Preface), and to expand very considerably the Greek Index.

Apart from these improvements, the present volume is to all appearance a reprint of the second edition. And it is not perhaps too much to ask that when a fourth edition is called

for, the publishers will find it possible completely to reset the work, so as to admit of the amalgamation of the two series of Additional Notes, and also to allow the author a freer hand in the revision of his original material.

Previous to this, however, we earnestly trust that Professor Moulton will have given us the second volume, that is being so eagerly looked for. It is true that work such as this cannot be hurried, and that the amount of research required in the case of the papyrus and other documents of which he is making such large use, is simply enormous. At the same time there are many evidences that he must already have the bulk of his material at his command, and we look confidently to his allowing no *parerga*, however interesting in themselves, to stand in the way of the completion of this all-important work. In the Preface to the present edition Dr. Moulton speaks feelingly of the fact that Professor Schmiedel in his new edition of Winer is still in the middle of the sentence where he left off ten years ago. Let him see to it that he does not give the Zurich Professor the least possible excuse for a '*tu quoque*' retort.

GEORGE MILLIGAN.

THE GREEK AND EASTERN CHURCHES.

THE GREEK AND EASTERN CHURCHES.
By Walter F. Adeney, M.A., D.D.
(Edinburgh: *T. & T. Clark.* 12s.)

So great has been the success of the 'International Theological Library' that the series is to be extended, and, for one thing, it is to cover the History of the Church. No doubt the merit of Principal Lindsay's *Reformation* has helped to form that resolution; it will also help to carry the series to a triumphant finish.