

SCIENCE VS. THEOLOGY.

Theology is a "theory of things" based, as we have seen, upon an error natural and inevitable to the infancy of man—the error of trying to know what must remain unknowable, and thereby deceiving the fact concerning the difference between dreams and realities, of furnishing the invisible world with the facts of experience, of creating God after our own image.

We may now contrast science with theology. In two respects they are similar; in all others they are opposed. Science and theology are both "theories of things," and are both based upon assumptions.

The assumption of science is "that eternal, invariable order reigns over the whole universe; that no fact, mental or material, exists except as a link in an endless chain of cause and effect, the same antecedents being invariably followed by the same consequents."

Theology assumes that God is a being in nature similar to man; that invariable order does not exist; that miracles have happened, do still happen, and may happen at any time; that no fact exists except as a product of the will of the man-like God.

Science regards it as the proper object of inquiry—to ascertain, and to express in correct formulas, the order in which facts occur. These when found by invariable experience to be correct, she calls "laws of nature." A broken law of nature is, from a scientific point of view, a contradiction in terms.

Theology asserts that the proper aim and object of all inquiry is to know what is the will of the man-like God; that this knowledge is to be found in books called collectively "Divine Revelation," written by men of old time, who were inspired in a miraculous manner, or in the word-of-mouth utterances of men of a certain class set apart to communicate it, and that all other knowledge is at best comparatively useless and, if opposed to this, detrimental. The breaking of God's laws by man is not only possible, but constant; and a large proportion of theological forms and ceremonies consist but of devices to propitiate God, with a view to escape the punishment which his anger thus caused would certainly bring. These forms and modes of propitiation, identical in principle with the means adopted by peoples to propitiate earthly rulers, include sacrifice, prayer, flattery, self-abasement and self-inflicted pain, such as fasting, injury to the body, wearing of filthy clothing, living away from friends—in fact, all forms of misery—all of them self-inflicted in this world to gain the favor of God in the next. And granting that the nature of God is manlike, these theological customs are rational.

In the theologies of people in the same stage of intellectual and moral development as the Hebrew Abraham, whose God was supposed to be compelled to come down from heaven to investigate by personal inquiry rumors of bad conduct which he had heard (Gen. xviii. 20

21), there is no incongruity in the supposition of men being able to break God's laws as they had the power to break the laws of their earthly king. But when the attributes of omniscience and omnipotence came to be conceived; the idea of man breaking the laws of God became absurd. "No man can enter a strong man's house and spoil his goods unless he first bind the strong man." If two forces meet, the weaker cannot prevail. To suppose so is as much a contradiction in terms as it is to talk of a broken law of nature in the scientific sense. If God wills that man shall not do a certain act and man says he will do it, and does it, it follows that man's will is stronger than God's will. This contradiction is veiled by the supposition that, although man can for a time overcome God, yet ultimately God's superior strength will be proved. Another explanatory supposition is that God has created in man a thing called "free will," which has been left unconditioned by any cause. Still another mode of treating the difficulty is to put it aside with the remark that the fact of man acting contrary to the will of God is a "deep mystery." "When a crime is committed, if it was allowed that man could not break a law of God, nor act contrary to his will, God would be made a direct participator in the crime—a supposition that would be blasphemy. Yet, on the other hand it is a contradiction in terms to say that a creature could overcome his Almighty Creator. This is a great mystery, and as such it must be left."

In theology this resource for getting rid of a difficulty by labelling it a "mystery," and so putting it on one side, is a very necessary one. In science, when facts and theory do not agree, the theory is at once and without hesitation rejected. In theology this is impossible. The fundamental theory, that God is man-like, is contained in a miraculous revelation. Touch that with the hand of criticism, and theology ceases to exist. Hence the origin of the theological dogma, that of all virtues faith is the greatest, and that of all sins doubt is the most fatal. "He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved; and he that believeth not shall be damned." Science says: All I assume is that facts exist, and will continue to exist, in an invariable order. My dogmas are to be accepted not absolutely, but always subject to verification by experience;

and, if any of them do not stand that test, they are at once to be discarded." Theology, on the other hand, deals with a subject in which verification is impossible, the nature of God not being a subject of experience.

The contrast between science and theology has been very tersely expressed by Dr. Magee, the present Bishop of Peterborough: "Science, abhors finality in belief; but that is just what theologians like. Science discovers facts, but theology accepts revelation, and clings to creed." Science, as the Bishop most truly says, could not accept "finality in belief," seeing that her dogmas rest entirely on the verification of experience. Theology, on the other hand, dealing as she does with things outside the range of verification, can accept this finality; and, feeling instinctively that her feet rest upon the ground, not of reason, but of imagination, she naturally hates the idea of being liable at any moment to criticism and correction. Science is content to spend all her time in laboriously searching for facts—that is, for truth—within the horizon of the knowable. In the eyes of a theologian this is miserable work. While science is grubbing (as he thinks) in the earth—in the narrow field of experience—theology is soaring in the sky, in the boundless universe of existence, seeing what eye has never seen, hearing what ear has never heard, and learning what it is impossible for the unaided human mind to conceive. Here indeed in her natural element, beyond the realms of experience, theology does enjoy the freedom she desires: she is beyond the reach of criticism, and exempt from all necessity to change.

Seeing, then, that science and theology are the very opposites of each other, it must be a futile task to reconcile them: The one is the product of reason and experience, the other of imagination and feeling. Yet repeated failure does not seem to discourage the attempt. The explanation of this is simple. A person born, reared, and schooled under the influence of theology naturally clings to the creed of his mother. To pull up what has its roots deep in the feeling necessarily causes great pain. On the other hand, it is impossible to deny the triumphs of science. The evidence for her truths is overwhelming. What, then, is this age of transition, more natural than the wish to accept the teachings of science without giving up the dogma of theology? They both profess to be true, and truth is single; there must therefore, be only a seeming contradiction. Let us find out the way of reconciliation. The task, like the discovery of perpetual motion, is a fascinating one; but it is equally hopeless. Science and theology are mutually opposed: the "dis-

covery and acceptance of facts' is, from the nature of things, incompatible with the "accepting of revelation and clinging to a creed."

There is but one plan by which one and the same person may be both a scientist and a theologian, and that plan is to make a division of time and become each in turn. A certain time—generally ~~very small fraction of the total~~—is told off to theology, and during it the person tries to talk, think, and act as a theologian. The remainder of the time is devoted to the service of science, and acting in accordance with the facts she has discovered. The great Faraday himself, one of the most eminent scientists of the century, lived in this twofold existence. During the day he thought and acted on the strictest principles of science while in the evening he would talk and act as a member of the obscure theological sect called Sandemanians. Faraday during the day and Faraday in the evening were practically two distinct persons.

But, in this, Faraday only represents the vast majority of men. People go to church on Sunday, and there, with grave and solemn faces, "accept revelation," assenting to the dogmas and legends of an age when theology was in its prime and science an infant, and then for the rest of the week they think and act without hesitation, as if they had never heard of revelation and had no faith in ancient legends. This inconsistency, if conscious, would be productive of great moral deterioration by lessening the love of truth; but as it is for the most part unconscious—people generally not really believing what they think they believe—this evil is much less than might be expected. The attempt at reconciliation by twisting and stretching revealed doctrines to make them fit perforce with the facts discovered by science is much more deteriorating morally than unconscious inconsistency. It is really melancholy to see attempts made to stretch twenty-four hours into millions of years; to transmute the legends of Noah and Jonah into history; and to try to force the word "creation" to mean its opposite "evolution." These and such-like endeavors to reconcile modern science with ancient theology are worse than futile; they have a distinct tendency to destroy the greatest of all virtues—truthfulness.—John Wilson.

A BENEDICTION.

Now, as we are about to resume again our daily vocations of life, let us each take with us the inspiration of love, friendship and charity. Let us think freely and without prejudice, expressing our convictions with that courage which fears no evil.

Let us seek liberty, subdue passion, be wise and bless humanity with all our minds and hearts; be faithful in all things, rise above deceit, lead lives of purity and truth; and the fruits of our righteousness shall abide forever.—D. G. Crow.