

The Problem of Protestantism for the Twentieth Century

By David S. Muzzey

HISTORY, like nature, has its seasons: summer-tides of bloom and fruitage, growing into gray autumns of harvest; long winters of barrenness of thought and slavery of expression, broken up by the liberating sun of new spiritual gifts and new spiritual senses. The opening of our century was such a springtime of history. "Bliss it was in that dawn to be alive, but to be young was very heaven." The gospel of humanity was preached by Schleiermacher, the powers of humanity were calculated by Kant, the heart of humanity was searched by Goethe. The tragic events enacted in Paris were but a type of a wider revolution extending through all the sphere of human concerns. Liberation from unproven and unjustified authorities into the liberty of the sons of God and of the sons of men was the watchword of the day. Personality was honored above profession of creed. Dogmatism, whether in politics, in economics, in philosophy, or in religion, yielded to the spirit of sane and constructive criticism. The laborious systems spun out of giant brains like Leibnitz's and Spinoza's broke together like the winter's ice-floe under the warm touch of spring. History was written now, not as a chronicle, but as a drama; and nature was studied under the splendid inspiration of the doctrine of the continuity and interrelationship of all God's vast creation.

The leaven of the closing decades of the eighteenth century has leavened the nineteenth, and the problems set for Protestantism by that revival have grown more pressing as the century has advanced, until, as it nears its close, they confront Christendom with such serious challenge as makes the task of our religious leaders to-day, I repeat, one of grave responsibility. Here I intend to note briefly three of the problems of Protestantism which appeal to me as primary at this day: the historical-critical problem, the moral-philosophical problem, and the social-industrial problem.

It has come to be recognized as a truth almost axiomatic, since Lessing first recorded the principle in his immortal work on "The Education of the Human Race," that an idea once sown in the intellectual world must come sooner or later to its fruition. The seed may be oppressed by heavy weights of conservative majorities and its fruitage delayed by the chill winds of a complacent ridicule or the premature scorchings of persecution; but the slow growth of spiritual freedom is none the less a sure growth, ripening into a hardy harvest.

When Semler, a little over a century ago, inaugurated the historico-critical study of the Bible, he was reviled as an atheist by some and pitied as a castaway by others more charitable. To-day even the ultra-conservative theologians who still champion the exemption of the canonical writings from "secular" criticism are obliged to defend their position by weapons borrowed from Semler's arsenal. It is almost as idle a task to-day to vindicate the right of the higher criticism as it is a work of supererogation to demonstrate its historical validity.

Not that any of the manifold schools of criticism in our century has enriched the Christian Church with a body of uniformly persuasive and permanently valid tenets. Theology is so intimately bound up with current influences in philosophy, sociology, and liturgics even, that we must not too grievously take it to heart if Protestantism is here or there shunted to the side tracks of Tübingenism or Tractarianism. This is of comparatively insignificant moment. What is of importance for Protestantism to-day as touching the problem of criticism is this—that, however prone to error or subject to change the *results* of the higher criticism are, the *method* of the higher criticism has come into Protestantism to stay. You may as well attempt to study astronomy while ignoring the spectroscope, or to practice medicine while scorning the bacillus, as to attempt to contribute to the sane spirituality and religious devotion of to-day

by belying or belittling, in the literary study of the Bible and in the historical study of the Church, that principle which is the *charisma* of our century—the principle of the historic genetic evolution of all our institutions, our literatures, our creeds, and even our consciousness itself. We should not be surprised, perhaps, to read the fulminations of a Pius IX. and a Leo XIII. against such innovations as modern progress entails in Church or creed; but when our General Assemblies promulgate their “Syllabi,” and indulge in the anathemas of an inviolable authority against modern learning and the spirit of honest research, then the dreadfully prophetic vision is conjured up again of “culture paired with unbelief and Christianity with barbarism.”

For the noise of heresy trials and the loud, self-advertising protests of some few demagogues in the pulpit, the problem of the higher criticism is likely to seem to the public to be the most immediate and burning problem of Protestantism at the opening of the new century. But this is not so. In reality, it is, I believe, the very least of the three problems I have mentioned. For not only does the rivalry of the schools furnish, together with the materials of Biblical criticism, also the mutual check which prevents the tyranny of any hasty theory over the Church at large, but in fact the higher criticism is altogether rather a matter for the schools. The general Christian public really care about as much for the integrity of a prophecy or the date of a Gospel as they do for the chronology of Euripides's plays. The person of Jesus Christ is their religion, and the canonical books of Scripture are of value to them, not as dating from the Apostles, but as breathing the spirit of Christ. We shall learn to be served by the letter and nourished by the spirit of the Christian documents; and when that day shall have come, the vexed question of the historical and literary criticism of the New Testament will be relegated to the purely scientific field where it belongs.

Of much more fundamental and urgent importance is the moral-philosophical problem of Protestantism. By that I mean the recognition of the astounding ascendancy of moral over theological issues, of ethics over dogmatics, in our century, and

the consequent attitude of the Protestant Church toward the claims of an ethical religion.

Here, again, we are referred for our point of departure to the spiritual revival of a hundred years ago. The same movement by which the emphasis of philosophy shifted from the hypothetical demonstration of a transcendent natural order to the critical investigation of the human soul itself—from Spinoza and Wolf, that is, to Kant and Fichte—witnessed also the shifting of the religious interest from a purely theological (transcendent) to an anthropological (experimental) basis. It is an extremely interesting and suggestive exercise to run through the index merely of the *Histories of Theology* of the last two centuries, and see how thoroughly the systems of Christian dogmatics of the eighteenth century have yielded to the systems of Christian ethics in the nineteenth. Indeed, not a few of the leading theologians both at home and abroad have proclaimed the bankruptcy of the traditional Protestant theology, as developed in the seventeenth century and defended in the eighteenth, and have declared boldly for an “undogmatic Christianity.” Even in the conservative schools the chair of Dogmatics is notably the hardest to fill. The occupant of one of the most honorable chairs of Systematics in our country began his lectures, I am told, with the remark: “Gentlemen, at present we have no dogmatic theology; the returns have not yet come in for system-building.” The most vital and virile writings on the subject call themselves, quite modestly, “prolegomena.”

All these suggestions are simply to show how the center of gravity of theology has changed from metaphysics to morals, and how inevitably the Church stands face to face to-day with the demands for continued and continual ethical reform in its preaching and in its standards. Public opinion on the question of acceptability to God is no longer molded exclusively by the preacher and the theologian. Our ministers are very properly denied their former rank of spiritual dictators, and confined to the humbler and diviner task of being the interpreters and the eulogists of such deepest religious problems and such clearest religious consciousness as the age in all its varied labor has brought

forth. At the opening of the century Joseph de Maistre could command a large public to read a book in which he maintained that all infidels die of loathsome and lingering diseases. Imagine, at the close of the century, even the most "inspired" of the self-appointed scourgers of God, for whom the death of Colonel Ingersoll has furnished the text for a pulpit harangue, as attempting to justify the ways of the Lord in removing that gentleman by a quick and painless stroke of apoplexy!

The Church has, to be sure, made long strides in sanity of judgment and humanness of creed in our century. Moral obliquity is no longer postulated universally as the corollary of theological dissent, and few of our more enlightened church members would prefer the prospects for eternity of an orthodox sharper to those of a skeptical philanthropist. Yet, for all our "sweetness and light," we believers are not entirely free from the odium of teaching in our pulpits and our Sunday-schools doctrines which may easily lead the consequent-minded youth to great offense and rebellion against the Church, and which continue to estrange a good, perhaps the best, element of our society—the quiet, humble, untheological souls who find no fault in the Christ, but only in the dismal attempts of his servants to interpret his Gospel to-day.

We must be rid entirely of this shifting moral opportunism in our religion. It is Jesuitical. It has no place in Protestantism—especially in the Protestantism of the twentieth century. We must not cease to purge our standards, even to the rabbinism of St. Paul himself, until we have eradicated, root and branch, all the immoral and malodorous elements which have in one age or another crept into our creeds, and until we stand high above any least suspicion of giving less ready and generous recognition than our brethren outside the Church to true manliness of character, coupled with any religious confession whatever.

The third and, as it seems to me, the gravest problem that Protestantism has to face at the opening of a new century is the social-industrial problem. And as this problem is the more absorbing and insistent in its demands on our religious workers to-day, so it is the more impossible

to be comprehended in a formula, or exhausted under a number of "heads." For the social problem appeals to the Church as a missionary institution rather than as a depositary of doctrine or a school of ideal philosophy. Its roots are in the very life of the Church; it asks nourishment of the sap of the Church. It judges the Church where it finds it, after an old unwritten word of Jesus, and that not in respect of doctrine or of liturgy, but in respect of charity and brotherly love.

In the main the social problem is the outgrowth, not of theological and religious issues, but of political and industrial conditions. Yet, in a sense far deeper than is generally realized, this problem is a result of the two more strictly theological problems just suggested. For, in the first place, the historical-literary criticism of the origins of the Church and its documents, combined with a renewed interest in the study of comparative religions, has made it evident that Christianity as we know it is largely a product of the development of a given society at a given point in the world's history, and so has emboldened many a modern prophet to declare that what one society has produced another may, nay, must, improve upon; and, in the second place, the shifting of theological interest from the metaphysical to the moral, from the transcendent to the empirical, from a fictitious future to the everlasting now, has brought the Church into infinitely closer touch with the workaday life of humanity, and has forced upon the Church the serious consideration of a host of social problems such as a sleek vicar or a consistent Calvinistic clergyman of a century ago would have ignored as completely as he ignored the heathen or any other uncomfortable fact.

Shall we incur anew the rebuke of the Lord, who said to the self-satisfied tradition-mongers of his own generation, "Ye can discern the face of the sky and of the earth; but how is it that ye do not discern this time?"

Do we not discern the manifold agencies at work outside the Church to cope with existing social evils, and to cultivate sound social fiber in our cities and in our country districts alike—ethical culture societies, university settlements, Fabian

societies, charitable guilds? Have not the clearest voices of our own Christian prophets, Brooks, Hyde, Bradford, Gladden, Newton, been raised to warn the Church to broaden her channels for this new flow of divine grace in the rediscovered brothership and solidarity of humanity?

Is there not a new import to-day to the question, Who is a Christian? and are not the rolls of the kingdom of heaven, as the Church has compiled them in the past, open to revision? That we have Luther or Calvin or Wesley to our Father is nothing; for God is able to raise up of the stones of the Tenderloin district children unto Luther and Calvin. He does not need the Church, but the Church needs Him, and needs to learn ever anew, and to heed with ever-new courage and consecration, His will. "The history of the Church in the nineteenth century," says the great German historian Friedrich Nippold, "is less than ever before synonymous with the history of Christianity." Can the Church allow such a judgment of her to be registered in the twentieth century?

In offering these suggestions of the problems of Protestantism at the present day I have tried to seize on the most salient features of modern religious thought and effort the world over. Obviously, the problem of Protestantism in its narrower and more specific character differs widely in every land, and is determined by long inheritance of national character as well as by more immediate political or social exigencies. For example, in Germany, the fatherland of Protestantism, the lines of religious advance are determined by the two foci of resistance to Roman Catholic aggression and of development of a theology on the basis of the Kantian philosophy. Furthermore, State and Church are connected in such a way as to give the Protestantism of Germany a certain tinge of imperialism which is quite incomprehensible to us in America. Again, in England there are conservative forces in the Protestantism of the State which keep to the fore problems that have never even occurred to our American Protestantism, with its roots in Puritan soil. A long tradition is a historic glory, but it is often also a religious incubus. England is still fighting the Battle of the Boyne

with Rome; and liturgical riots can excite a passion in the Church of England to-day such as we wonder at and smile at. In France, finally, the problem of Protestantism is to keep alive. The sparse two hundred thousand Protestants in a population of nearly forty millions, which is divided equally between Jesuits and agnostics, are not even of enough moment to be persecuted seriously in the lamentable "affaire" which has been calling out all the gall and rancor of racial and religious prejudice in France. Brisson was dubbed "Huguenot," to be sure; but even that was rather for the superscription of a caricature in a comic paper. The nickname is apt, however—the French Protestants are still Huguenots. The Inquisition in Spain did not do its work of repression more thoroughly than did St. Bartholomew's night and the dragonnades of Louis the Fourteenth.

It is in America that the great opportunity of Protestantism in the twentieth century lies. With our material resources, with our fundamental Anglo-Saxon endowment of character, with our traditions of political and religious autonomy, with our democratic institutions, with our Church separated from any embarrassing subsidies of State, we are better able clearly to conceive, honestly to discuss, and effectively to meet the tremendous scientific, ethical, and social problems of Protestantism which lie before us in the new century. The future belongs neither to a creed nor to a sect. Inscrutable authorities once universally bowed to are now almost as universally questioned. Infallible standards are not exempted from searching criticism and honest judgment by any desperate appeal to their antiquity of tradition, nor is the voice of reason drowned in the fanatic's shout of Infidel!

A trying age for the Church! is the moan of many; but rather, I think, is it a glorious age for the Church—an age of unparalleled opportunity of making speedy and honorable amends to science for having trespassed willfully these many centuries on her field of activity, and of devoting heart and soul henceforth to the high and Godlike mission of interpreting the divine dreams of the human soul, and of mediating to men the comforts and the completeness of that Christ who is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever.

The Argentine Wheat Farm

By G. P. Dike

THE article by Mr. Charles B. Spahr in The Outlook of November 4 last on "The Northern Farm" interested me very much, but especially in connection with a visit that I have just made to the great farming regions of the Pampas in Argentina. In the article mentioned, Mr. Spahr spoke of David A. Wells's proposition that "the independent small farm is soon to be a thing of the past," and then went on to show that the tendency in the Northwest has been in just the opposite direction—that is, toward small holdings cultivated by the owner. The same tendency is to be seen on the Pampas, but in a more marked degree, due to the peculiar industrial conditions of the country. In Argentina I never heard any mention of the movement toward small holdings, but it was none the less apparent even to the inexperienced observer.

The Pampas, or the prairies, of South America lie south and west of Buenos Ayres and the River Platte, but those due south show most advancement in methods of cultivating the land, and it is of them that I speak. Though the land is tremendously fertile and the climate all that can be desired for wheat-growing, it is only within the last fifteen years that cattle-raising has been pushed aside by wheat-growing. This is a result of a government of doubtful stability and still more doubtful integrity, as well as of a lack of railroads. These conditions are slowly improving, and, in spite of them, the farmers are getting ahead. The land is wholly in the hands of the moneyed classes, who are ready to rent it, but never think of selling it to the farmers. The farmers come from places where they have not been allowed to own land, so the idea of such ownership never occurs to them, and they are content with leasing it. Prior to the wheat-growing era, when the land was devoted exclusively to cattle and sheep raising, it was held in immense unfenced tracts called *estancias*, which varied in size from ten to a thousand square miles. In the center of each was the estancia house, where lived the man-

ager—he is called the *major-domo*—or the owner if he happened to manage his own land. About the estancia house were the quarters for the hands, the barns, the sheep-dip, and the corrals. It was the center of life and industry for the entire region. This was in the cattle-raising era, in the days when cattle were killed for their hides and horns. Then came the wheat, and with it a tremendous change, though it must be remembered that cattle are still raised in great numbers in connection with the wheat-growing, or on the *estancias* remote from railroads.

When the *estancias* began to plant wheat, the *major-domos* superintended the work themselves, as on the "bonanza" farms of the Northwest. The laborers lived in the quarters about the estancia house, and went to and from the more or less distant fields twice a day. For a while, and until too much land was under cultivation, this worked well. The requisites for a successful *major-domo* made it next to impossible to obtain suitable men. The grasp and comprehension of a general, coupled with the education and technical knowledge of a scientist, were necessary, not to mention the need of a thousand eyes, the greatest tact, and an iron constitution. Without such a man for manager, the little losses which eat up the profits asserted themselves, and the system broke down from its own weight. Then came the change to what is known as the "colony" system, which is just now very popular, though there are yet some *estancias* where the old idea of centralization still holds.

In the "colony" system the land is rented to the tenants in small holdings, for which they pay a specified cash rent, or a share of the crop raised. In the former case the tenant owns his mares, plows, and harvesting machinery. The tenant builds in three days a very comfortable house of sod with a galvanized iron roof, and is ready for work. The wiser landowners do not allow tenants to rent as much land as they wish, but allot them a little less than the tenant thinks he can cultivate. This insures more thorough