

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php

ARTICLE X.

CALDERWOOD THE CRITIC OF AGNOSTICISM.

BY PROFESSOR GABRIEL CAMPBELL, S. T. D.

THE report just issued by our Commissioner of Education announces the decease of Dr. Henry Calderwood, Professor of Philosophy in Edinburgh University, successor of the well-known Christopher North. Of the remarkable thinkers of the nineteenth century, Professor Calderwood ranks among the strongest and finest. Although called to lecture in leading institutions in this country, and by Yale honored as a guest, as Harvard honored the celebrated Professor Jebb of England, Dr. Calderwood exercised an influence over the thought of the day which has far surpassed its popular recognition. A man of the sturdy build and simple demeanor of our General Grant, not lacking also in Grant's matter-of-fact intuition and persistency, it may appear that, in his field, he was as truly great. Nay, when the decisive battles for right reason are critically weighed in the light of coming years, Calderwood may be found the greater leader of the two.

My tribute to Dr. Calderwood is inspired by the fact that it was my good fortune to be associated with him for a time during my student days, and to experience somewhat fully the depth of his diviner life and of his friendship, and especially of his power to master not a few of the profoundest problems of the time. Professor Calderwood was some ten years my senior. Most of this period he had spent in the pulpit. His ability as a philosopher, however, displaying itself more and more, he was called to his rightful task as leader of thought in the University of the Athens

of Scotland, three and thirty years ago. My own appointment to the chair of philosophy in this country was so near the same time that when, in 1870, I was on my way to Germany to better my preparation, I found Professor Calderwood in Edinburgh giving his newly devised lectures, and planning likewise to take studies on the Continent; and the following year he joined me in Berlin. The import of our mutual endeavor, particularly of Dr. Calderwood's career, will be interpreted more clearly by a reference to attending circumstances.

Contemporary with Christopher North, and occupying the coördinate chair of philosophy, was Sir William Hamilton, the greatest of Scotland's metaphysicians. In philosophy he was the culmination of the Scottish school. A man surpassingly brilliant and learned, his intellectual sons inherit his wealth. One of the honor men of the class of '53 was Henry Calderwood; and his preëminent capacity displays itself at once. The first year after graduation he published the "Philosophy of the Infinite." With a critical vision trained under the master, the pupil detects the vulnerable point in his master's system; and with marvelous logic, which won the praise of Sir William himself, he proceeds to show that Hamilton's reasoning fails where it reaches the all-important fact, our knowledge of a Divine Being; Hamilton claiming that the existence of God is for us a matter not of knowledge, but only of belief—irresistible indeed. In his "Philosophy of the Infinite" Calderwood compasses the whole question as to our intelligence of the unconditioned, the absolute, the infinite, maintaining that man's belief in God is recognized as irresistible because it involves elements of knowledge, quoting Sir William himself in support of his position.

Forsooth a formidable champion of Hamilton's cause comes to the front. It is no less a personage than Dean Mansel, of St. Paul's, professor at Oxford, the particular

star of English theology, a scholar of rare logical acumen. In his Bampton lectures he marshals an imposing array of authorities, mainly German, to prove that human intelligence brings no relief to theology. "The Limits of Religious Thought" enable us only to believe, not to know. The book proved to be a signal reënforcement of agnosticism from an unexpected quarter; and, having at first a rapid sale, injured lamentably the cause it sought to aid.

Another notable circumstance was the appearance of Stirling's "Secret of Hegel." The author was a writer of unmistakable versatility. Attracted by the genius of Hegel, he had spent a considerable time in Germany studying and translating. He appears to have been the first English scholar who had made an independent survey of Hegel's teachings in the original; the earliest, as his work proclaimed, to reach the *secret* of Hegel's thought. His countrymen heretofore had gotten, he intimates, only scraps at second hand, even Hamilton being uninformed or misinformed; Mansel, of course, coming in the same category. It was in certain respects a most suggestive, not to say sensational book; a trumpet call certainly to an intelligent judgment. Stirling claimed not only that Hegel had answered the skepticism of Hume, but, as an impartial critic, had elevated the Gospel histories to a superior credibility.

One other fact of supreme moment was the incoming afresh of the teachings of Immanuel Kant. Although Calderwood in his references to Kant formally rejects sundry statements, it is virtually under the inspiration of Kant, the most influential of all Germany's thinkers, that he carries forward so successfully his critique of Sir William Hamilton. The fact of the Divine existence, according to Kant, far from being a mere belief, far even from depending on the probabilities of science, is rather an original element, insurmountable, of man's practical reason.

Sir William Hamilton wrote a short response to Calderwood's criticism. He was, however, cut down somewhat suddenly, and never produced a complete reply. Professor Calderwood's book met a want so pronounced that in a little time a second edition, much enlarged, was issued. This was a powerful rejoinder as well to Mansel as to Hamilton; and it was Dorner's letter from Berlin commending the book that turned the scale in Calderwood's favor, and gave him his election to the chair in Edinburgh University; a voice from Germany decided the patrons of the University to enthrone the critic of their own greatest philosophic thinker. Meanwhile, at Glasgow University, a similar event comes to pass. Dr. Edward Caird is called to the corresponding chair. He proves to be the most noted representative, outside of Germany, of German critical thinking.

Such was the change in the spirit of the dream in Philosophy. Even Scotland no longer admonishes her sons to accept only home production. At Oxford, Jowett and Max Müller, concur in advising me to continue my journey across the Rhine. "Oxford," says Professor Müller, "knows little of German philosophy. You must hear Trendelenburg. He is the most eminent thinker in Germany." So I continue my pilgrimage to the shrine of Teutonic lore, and pitch my tent in the German capital, taking, among other courses, Hegel's Logic; the first American student; I was told, who had chosen it.

In due time comes on my colaborer, Calderwood; and discussion became the order of the day. Bonitz was expounding Plato; Trendelenburg, Aristotle; Cohen, Kant in private lessons; Dorner filling the largest auditorium. When Dr. Calderwood related to Dorner the result of his letter, the latter expressed his gratification, complimenting Calderwood's book in emphatic terms, as one that "unmasks the fallacy of an unknowable God"; and we were ever welcome guests at Dorner's house.

Harms was then Germany's most renowned psychologist; and well I recall his lecture answering Bain. Alexander Bain he referred to as the admiration of the English universities; and being, he said, a son of Scotland and a professor there, represented a land for whose thinking Germany had profound respect. Harms proceeds to criticise Bain's claim that we can scientifically connect the physical and the mental. On the blackboard he has a representation of the structure of the brain; and with a transcendent clearness and precision, simply and deliberately, he shows point after point where Bain's logic fails, ending with the words, "Bain's claim, you see, is a tissue of assumptions." A major-general would not have shown more power in carrying a fortress. Indeed, Bain being the ablest English writer on psychology in the half-century, the critique had the inspiration of an international contest. At the suggestion of Dr. Calderwood, we went back later in the day to examine again Harms' diagram and to review his demonstration. Calderwood's own reply to Bain appears soon after in his "Handbook of Moral Philosophy," more fully, however, in his later work, "Relations of Mind and Brain," where the spirit of Harms is clearly visible. Indeed, what work meets more satisfactorily the contentions just now in the air?

But I cannot enter upon the details of our experiences—our prolonged walks, beauties of Thiergarten, Platz, and suburb adding an enchantment to philosophical inquiry. My companion was at his best in debate; here indeed he showed his true nobility. Scarcely can we find in literature a contest at once so incisive and affectionate as that between Hamilton and Calderwood; and our arguments were to me personally, not more a rigorous discipline, than a pleasure ever to be remembered.

Dr. Calderwood was lacking somewhat in acquaintance with the German tongue. He, however, would gain the

appreciation of the professors by his facile use of the Latin. Still, in the handling of the German he was, as a rule, remarkably successful. Of course upon occasions would come a touch of the humorous. One evening before leaving the city, he entertained a few of his fellow-professors with a collation at his room. In order that we might be undisturbed, he directed the hostess to provide in advance an extra pitcher with hot water so that we could at will replenish the pot of tea. What was our astonishment, on coming to the table, to find the teapot sitting as sweetly as a swan in the center of an immense bowl of steaming water. No one was more hearty in the laugh that followed than Dr. Calderwood; he quickly summons the hostess, who, blushing at our confusion, says with the finest courtesy, "It is as ordered." A suggestion or two, and the matter was righted; and a happy evening ensued.

Professor Calderwood was present, as a guest of honor, at the dedication of the Hegel monument, which immediately followed the return of the victorious emperor from the siege of Paris. Several times he was similarly the guest of the Philosophical Society, and would have been further honored by membership but for the solitary slight want of facility just mentioned.

The conspicuous charm of Dr. Calderwood was the sincerity of his faith. In all the struggles with questions that human wisdom cannot resolve, his religious convictions remained clear and strong. He never ran to vagaries. Of his religion, rationality must ever be the handmaid. He saw that Hamilton's philosophy was serving the skeptic, the atheist even; and it became his mission to save genuine thinking from such an abyss. Hamilton, however masterful, loses his leadership; Mansel, too, who pleads for belief in a God he claims we cannot know, is early recognized as a wandering star.

Professor Calderwood has been umpire in large measure

of the developing thought of his country. A guide of youth in the university, and a referee in case of book reviews, he has preserved confidence, meeting the iconoclastic tides as has no other. Tennyson used to remark upon the reviews by Christopher North, who well may be considered a literary genius, but, in philosophic endowment and attainment, scarcely to be compared with his successor, whose opinion in issues of grave import exerted a control by far more deep and wide.

Dr. Henry Calderwood "stood foursquare to all the winds that blew." If he won and prized the sympathy of the churches, in the social or moral world he could brave public sentiment and calmly meet the attacks of conventionalism, ostracized, it might be, by his own colleagues. An incident is suggestive. A few friends were invited to dine, including the erudite but eccentric Professor Blackie. As Dr. Blackie enters the dining-room he peers scrutinizingly across the table. "I see you have no wine. Did you think I couldn't restrain myself? I consider this a personal insult." Moving hastily for hat and cane, he takes his leave—a program he had, no doubt, planned in advance.

Calderwood's masterpiece met an emergency and was a positive advance upon the thought of the day. Representative of a stage of progress—not the overthrow but the rightful development of Hamilton—it is one of the most remarkable books Scotland has produced. Why did not the errors of such commanding thinkers as Bain and Mansel and Hamilton lead a generation astray? The student of the history of philosophy will answer, Because Henry Calderwood lived.