THE PHILOSOPHICAL METHOD OF THE NEW THEOLOGY.

In venturing upon a discussion of the philosophical basis of the Rev. R. J. Campbell's book called *The New Theology*, I wish at the outset to warn readers against certain misconceptions which readily possess the mind at such a juncture. One misconception, which is perhaps natural enough, is that those who do not agree with the theories put forward by Mr. Campbell are prejudiced against all reform of theology. They are persons quite contented with current orthodoxy, crusted theological Tories fearing lest any change in doctrine should imperil the existence of faith, men so habituated to ancient shibboleths that the sound of any newer phraseology is of necessity blasphemy in their ears. Against this notion a vigorous protest needs to be uttered. There are many men who see quite clearly that a restatement of Christian doctrine is necessary, and who earnestly seek such guidance as shall show how that restatement can be made in an effective and reasonable fashion, so that theology may renew her attraction to enlightened and pious minds and may take her proper place as queen of the sciences. They find it, however, utterly impossible to accept the teaching of *The New Theology* and refuse to follow Mr. Campbell, not because they are obscurantists or because they think that all change is degeneration, but because they have the interests of a real reform of theology at heart. They feel that, at the present moment, there is nothing more favourable to reaction or more inimical to true progress than the theories which are being urged upon them as an acceptable exposition of liberal theology. To them it is therefore clear that the first duty of the reformer is to scrutinize these theories

closely and to criticize them with the utmost candour. They fear Mr. Campbell's teaching, not lest it should accelerate, but lest it should postpone the coming of a true theology.

The second misconception against which a warning should be uttered is that which assumes an antithesis between *The New Theology* and some system called the Old Theology. Mr. Campbell always speaks as though there were some definite theological system accepted by all Christians save a group of daring heretics of whom he is a mouthpiece, and as though this system were in direct opposition to his teaching. The contrary of this is the case. There was not, when Mr. Campbell published his book, and is not now, any generally accepted Old Theology. There were and are the fragments of a number of theologies. The teaching from our pulpits and in our theological books was and is of confusing variety. Calvinism and Arminianism, Determinism and Free Will doctrine, Gnosticism and Agnosticism, Salvation by Faith and Salvation by Works —these and a host of other antithetic principles jostle one another continually, not only within the confines of one denomination, but, often enough, within the limits of one sermon. The theological literature of the past twenty-five years is one continuous denial of the amazing misconception that British theology has been dominated by a definite system of doctrine properly called the Old Theology.

Again, it is well to state clearly that the methods or tendencies which Mr. Campbell cites as supporting his teaching, are in many instances quite irrelevant to it, and none of them lends to his theology any authoritative support. These methods and tendencies are modern, and have great influence with us. They are, among others, the Higher Criticism, social sympathies and natural science. These are names to conjure with, and Mr. Campbell does

conjure with them. But I venture to say that it is mere conjuring, and that none of these things is necessarily involved in the main body of his teaching, and that all are at least compatible with those doctrines he denounces. They are part of the subject matter with which every theologian must deal, either directly or indirectly, and it is mischievous to assert that they sanction speculations with which in reality they have but the vaguest connexion. That is to say, it is possible for a theologian to have the greatest respect for modern biblical research, and the deepest sympathy with the social aspirations of this age, and the humblest regard for what natural science can teach, without being in any degree a supporter of Mr. Campbell's teaching.

Now there is a definite connexion between these three warnings. The peculiarity of Mr. Campbell's New Theology is not its novelty, or its emancipation from older formularies, or its sympathy with modern methods and tendencies. It is something quite distinct from these, namely, a method of theologizing which is involved in a definite *Weltanschauung*. His teaching, where it is logically and successfully combatted, is opposed, not because of its novelty or its antithesis to what is older, or its sympathy with modern aspirations and achievements, but because of its method and its *Weltanschauung*. True, this teaching is seen to result in the rejection of many things of infinite spiritual value, and it is this rejection that stirs the hearts of the bulk of Mr. Campbell's critics. But theologians must not be content to protest against results—indeed, as scientific theologians (making for the moment a distinction which is not really valid, between the theologian or thinker and the religious man or believer) they have in the first place to deal only with methods, not with results. If we get the right method and apply it properly, the results *must* be right. So then we now ask, What is Mr. Campbell's method? What

is his object, and what are the means he adopts to secure that object?

I.

"The New Theology is an untrammelled return to the Christian sources in the light of modern thought." When I first read this sentence, which occurs in the first chapter of Mr. Campbell's book, I am free to admit that my pulse quickened. What a noble prospect it suggested! For a moment I put down the book and enjoyed the fair vision as of a promised land. If only we could enter that Canaan, leaving the desert of metaphysical abstractions and the cramping camps of our conventional creeds for the rich pasturage of that land flowing with milk and honey! I took the book again and harked back to the previous sentence: "And, creed or no creeds, we hold that the religious experience which came to mankind in Jesus of Nazareth is enough for all our needs, and only requires to be freed from limiting statements in order to lay firm hold once more upon the civilized world." Yes, I thought, that is the right line of advance. We must approach the consciousness of Jesus Himself as the real source of Christian revelation and the maker of Christian experience, and from this work out our new theology. So I started with a fresh zest to see whither this principle, rigidly applied, would lead the daring thinker. But alas! the very next sentence drove black clouds before my Pisgah prospect. I had thought in Mr. Campbell's company to take part in "an untrammelled return to the Christian sources," but no sooner were my hopes raised than our author went on to say that the starting point of the New Theology was "a re-emphasis of the Christian belief in the Divine immanence in the universe and in mankind." Sunshine was swiftly blotted out by fog. For here Mr. Campbell was in utmost lightness

of heart taking up one favoured doctrine and making this the condition and limit of his "return to the Christian sources." There is no pretence that the doctrine of "Divine immanence in the universe and in mankind" is obtained by an unprejudiced examination of the primitive Christian records. It is favoured rather because of its supposed harmony with modern philosophic thought. That is, it is at once a trammel upon the theologian in his research. And yet Mr. Campbell does not seem to be aware for a moment that in going from one to the other of the two sentences quoted he is completely changing his point of view. He does not realize that he is guilty of any inconsistency. He fancies that in the assertion of the views which make up the bulk of his volume (views which we shall soon have to look at more closely) he is actually engaged in this "untrammelled return." He believes himself to be altogether freed from the dead hand of traditionalism and from the repetition of formulae which make us deaf to the voice of the actual. So convinced is he that he is emancipated from dogmatism that, in a recent article in the *Hibbert Journal*, he has made this statement as to his teaching: "Its emphasis is positive, not negative; it is a return to simplicity of statement and to the preaching of an ethical gospel. Like Humanism, it discards every *theologoumenon* which has not a practical ethical value."

Scattered throughout *The New Theology* are indications that there lingers in Mr. Campbell's mind a reminiscence of the Pisgah prospect to which for a moment he turned his gaze in the first chapter. In discussing the doctrine of the Fall he says: "It is not integral to Christianity, for Jesus never said a word about it." Here is an attempt, clumsy it is true and unsuccessful, but nevertheless real, to apply the authority of Jesus as the source of our faith

to a definite doctrine. But it is only in rare instances that this test is applied, and no position is really based upon it. The doctrine of idealistic Monism, for example, is never judged by this standard.

Once or twice, indeed, Mr. Campbell utters in a pregnant sentence some truth gained by first-hand "untrammelled return to Christian sources." For instance, "It is no use trying to place Jesus in a row along with other religious masters. He is first and the rest nowhere; *we have no category for Him.*"[1] And again, "The life of Jesus was the undimmed revelation of the highest," and "how He managed to deliver His peerless teaching while making so little allusion to current Jewish modes of thought and worship is a mystery." Yet in every case he hastens to bury such words out of sight. He finds plenty of categories for Jesus: "Jesus was God, but so are we"; and, having made certain statements about the consciousness of Jesus, he asks: "Why should we not speak in a similar way about any other human consciousness?" And as for mystery, in other passages Mr. Campbell scouts the very idea, as when he says, "I do not think the Atonement is such a very great mystery after all, and it ought to be possible to get at the heart of it without stultifying the intellect. Anyhow, let us try."

At certain intervals then we see that Mr. Campbell has some notion as to the proper method of elaborating a new theology. But he does not apply his notion. It merely flits once in a while across his thought. He has another method in practice, and we shall now look at that method in some detail.

II.

Mr. Campbell has nothing to say in his book about faith.

[1] The italics are mine.

The reason is obvious. To him the intellect is everything. It is decisive in morals as well as in philosophy. "There is not," he says, "and never has been, an act of the will in which a man, without bias in either direction, has deliberately chosen evil in the presence of good." The phrase "without bias in either direction" almost robs the sentence of significance, but obviously Mr. Campbell means that an apprehension of the wickedness of a thing must be followed by the repudiation of that thing. It is the Socratic position that sin is due to ignorance. Selfishness, which is sin, is a quest of life and of God, but it is a blundering, unreasoned or unenlightened quest. The difference between selfishness and love is at bottom intellectual—due to the presence or absence of rational illumination. The crucial things are logically concatenated ideas. Of this Mr. Campbell has no doubt. "I dare say even the man in the street knows, quite as certainly as the man in the schools, that a metaphysical proposition underlies the doing of every moral act, even though it may never be expressed." If this be so, ultimate reality can be got at by the intellect, and by hard thinking eternal truths can be gripped. So the intellect is the final authority as to truth. In the statement, "The true seat of authority is within, not without, the human soul," the word "intellect" should be substituted for "soul." Now this intellectualism may be taken as an element in Mr. Campbell's method which is incompatible with his avowed principle of "untrammelled return to the Christian sources." It makes him quite ready to come to decisions independently of Jesus. His doctrine of the Trinity, from this intellectualist point of view, is not the outcome of revelation, nor is it necessarily derived from "the Christian sources." "I contend," he says, "that if we had never heard of the doctrine in connexion with Jesus, we should have to invent it now in order to account for ourselves and the

wondrous universe in which we live." And so too with other fundamental truths. They are not founded on faith, or on the revelation that is in Jesus. "Why is there a universe at all?" asks Mr. Campbell, and then answers, "What I have to say leads back through Hegelianism to the old Greek thinkers, and beyond them again to the wise men who lived and taught in the East ages before Jesus was born. It is that this finite universe of ours is one means to the self-realization of the infinite."

So then we see that the actual method of Mr. Campbell, instead of being "an untrammelled return to the Christian sources," is an untrammelled reliance upon the intellect—an untrammelled speculation. We now have to see in what direction this leads him.

III.

Before following Mr. Campbell's course thus, one remark must be made. Our author professes great respect for science—indeed, he claims to be her champion, and says, "The New Theology is the religion of science. . . . Science is supplying the facts which the New Theology is weaving into the texture of religious experience." Of beliefs which he criticizes he says, "they go straight in the teeth of the scientific method, which, even where the Christian facts are concerned, is the only method which carries weight with the modern mind." But these are only phrases, and by their use Mr. Campbell forces us to examine his references to science and to ask what sign he gives of an understanding of scientific method. We conclude that he has no remotest notion of what modern science means. I say this without any reservation. If there is one thing which the author of *The New Theology* has quite neglected to master, it is that "scientific method" which he asserts to be alone convincing to-day. For, in point of fact, the

project which he briefly stated and then gave up—that of the "untrammelled return to the Christian sources"—implied the scientific method. But Mr. Campbell's adoption of intellectualism killed any chance he had of using the scientific method, which is based on observation and experiment and not upon speculation.

Since he has turned aside from scientific method and adopted intellectualism, we find at once that Mr. Campbell is hampered by certain assumptions. They are part and parcel of his intellectual equipment, and their effect is to bring him constantly face to face with pompous metaphysical riddles. For instance, he says, "There cannot be two infinities, nor can there be an infinite and also a finite beyond it." These propositions would not bother a scientist for a moment. For, in the first place, if you use the word "infinite" in such a way as to give it any practical value at all, the whole statement is false. There is an indefinite series of infinites. You can have infinite extension in an infinite series of directions; you can have infinite duration in an infinite series of positions; and the two infinities of time and space may exist together and may be conceived without difficulty. But Mr. Campbell is not thinking of these infinites. He is thinking of an infinite which includes all special infinites—all infinites with which a mathematician, for instance, might deal. And so, in the second place, his statement, instead of being the profound announcement some might think it, is a mere tautology, and meaningless at that. When we speak of an infinite in the sense of Mr. Campbell's sentence—"Whatever distinctions of being there may be within the universe, it is surely clear that they must all be transcended and comprehended within infinity"—we mean no more than that we can apply the word infinite to the unthinkable congeries of finites, by abstracting from their differences

and calling them *one*. We shut our minds to their variety and their numberlessness—to the fact that they are *not* one, but an indefinite host—and say, "We will think of them under the one symbol—infinite." I cannot pause to elaborate this further, but will put it thus: we speak of the infinite thus simply in our effort to apply the category of number (and reduce to unity) what is in fact number*less*.

The distinction between the infinite and the finite which Mr. Campbell (having neglected scientific method) thinks so important, occurs in many guises. For instance, it makes him ask the question, "Why has the unlimited become limited?" which is a question like that of the Red Queen in *Through the Looking-Glass*, "What's the French for Fiddle-de-dee?" It has no facts behind it, and is in its implications as wild a bit of speculation as the statement, "I start, then, with the assumption that the universe is God's thought about Himself."

Obviously this intellectualism of Mr. Campbell's leads to a method which is the direct antithesis of the scientific method, namely, that of defining first and looking at the facts afterwards with a view to forcing the definition upon them. The assumption is made that the universe (whatever that may be) is "God's thought about Himself," and of course the facts of experience (sin for instance) must be made to fit in. This method is stated clearly enough when Mr. Campbell comes to deal with Jesus in Chapter V. In the first part of his chapter he manufactures definitions of deity, divinity and humanity, and then (although he had said "we have no category" for Jesus) he says, "Now let us apply these definitions to the personality of Jesus."

These effects of Mr. Campbell's intellectualism have their chief outcome in his doctrine of idealistic Monism, and to this we will now turn. NEWTON H. MARSHALL.

(*To be continued.*)