

THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY.

VOL. III.

AUGUST—SEPTEMBER, 1923.

Nos. 8 & 9.

Soederblom and Harnack in a Swedish Estimate.

PROF. W. H. T. DAU, St. Louis, Mo.

During March Prof. Adolph von Harnack, of Berlin, visited the principal ecclesiastical and academic centers of Sweden. His visit attracted a great deal of attention. A conservative paper like *Nya Dagligt Allehanda* celebrated the coming of the distinguished guest with fulsome praise.

The Twelfth General Convention of the Swedish Lutheran State Church had just closed its session when the renowned German Gnostic arrived. There is no apparent connection between the convention and Dr. Harnack's visit, except that both events aroused a great deal of public interest, and both afford glimpses of Swedish church-life under state control.

The convention was attended, not only by representatives from every part of Sweden, but also by invited guests from the adjacent countries to the East, the former provinces of Russia bordering on the Baltic, which had sent their bishops to the convention. *Nya Vaektaren*, for April, calls them the Swedish Archbishop Soederblom's "suffragan bishops." The preparations for the convention had been on a scale to excite great expectations. From a meeting of the leading men of the Swedish state church the public had a right to expect important deliberations bearing on Swedish church-life. In this the confessional Lutherans of Sweden were disappointed. Editor Svensson has called the great doings "a delusion," because "the convention, in fact, was not permitted to take the initiative in any matter or to issue any important declaration on the burning questions of the day." The archbishop, as usual, was charming and impressed the convention with his skill as chairman and general manager. He delivered a remarkably informing address on the state of affairs throughout the world and present-day politics, in which "he sided with both the French and the Germans, the Socialists and the Conservatives." He told

bitter truths and erased them again ("*Schwamm drueber*"). In the mean time he showed the delegates their seats and made himself "all-around useful." A Berlin paper reports that he touched with exceptional poignancy upon "the black shame" and pointed to the irony of fate that Germany, which had never fostered slavery, but had led in Christian missions to slave-tribes, should have these beneficiaries of hers visited upon her by former slave-trading nations. He held that the military use which was now being made of the black men in a war of white men boded ill to the future relation between the black and the white races.

An election of theological professors for the University of Upsala was impending, or had just taken place. There seemed to be a disposition among the delegates to discuss the qualifications of Docent Lindblom and Professor Wetter for these positions. But "on this point the archbishop was unyielding; he simply would not permit a question regarding the appointment of Professor Wetter to come up in the meeting." Professor Wetter is not at all acceptable to Bible Christians in Sweden. Regarding the archbishop's tactics in this matter *Nya Vaektaren* remarks: "This is easily understood by those who remember Nathan Soederblom when he was still a professor, and who will, moreover, reflect that the archbishop's crozier is not at all a means of grace which effects conversion from errors in theology, but at best causes the person to be a little more critical about his speech."

Editor Svensson voices his disgust at the repression policy adopted for this convention in these words: "We absolutely fail to understand what purpose a meeting of this kind is to serve. Was there not at this convention a remarkable opportunity for churchmen to pass a resolution and issue an authoritative declaration regarding their position over against the Confessions and the state, which in its doings is now non-Christian? Who is to blame for the fact that the attending pastors and representatives simply were not permitted to reveal what was on their minds? For the little discussion which was forced in spite of the chairman cannot be said to have been satisfactory. Moreover, what is the use of drawing together the pastors and congregational representatives from all over Sweden to make them sit in a church at Stockholm and hour for hour listen to addresses which either did not treat subjects of apparent weight or contained nothing beyond what the majority of the listeners understood nearly as well as the speaker? No, if these meetings are to have any meaning, let the pastors and representatives themselves come forward with questions, and

then let the discussion be started! The Swedish state church cannot experience any signal blessing from such an address as that of Sam. Thyssells. We can hardly believe that even the archbishop's opening address had any other signification for world politics than to show what an extraordinary talker the primate of the Swedish Church is. His attitude as 'bishop of the whole world,' who, like the Pope, devotes himself to world politics (*Stormaktspolitik* — politics of the Great Powers), hardly befits the leading man of so small a church as the Swedish. The whole procedure impressed one as if he 'wanted to do much and could do but little.'"

Harnack had come to Sweden to deliver lectures at Stockholm, Upsala, and Lund. Archbishop Soederblom had heralded him as "the greatest theologian of our time." Everywhere Harnack was ushered in as "His Excellency von Harnack." Editor Svensson relates: "He was interviewed and, amongst other things, asked for his opinion regarding the much-debated appointment of professors at Upsala. He was quite willing to speak. Docent Lindblom he did not know, but for Professor Wetter he offered ample testimony. He took him under his protecting wings and pledged his word that the professor was a distinguished man of science, etc. Harnack gave it as his opinion that it is of no great importance for Christianity what theology teaches or does not teach, for theology could as little create genuine Christianity as a history of art can create art. To be sure, that is undeniably true as regards the theology which Harnack and Wetter deliver. Meanwhile His Excellency's remarks regarding his knowledge of Wetter and his complete ignorance of Docent Lindblom's existence deserve to be noted. They are a revelation. It is this way: modern theologians take notice only of each other. When a scholar in any way favors a conservative position, they do not deem it necessary even to become acquainted with his teaching. And yet, how much more competent the latter are when real knowledge, both of the radical and the positive currents in modern research, is demanded!"

In Stockholm, Harnack spoke on the words of Jesus that are not recorded in the gospels, and on Augustine. Of the former lecture Editor Svensson says: "Regarded from a purely scientific viewpoint, it contained absolutely no new values, but proved to be simply an old school-task which Dr. Samuel Fries taught us Swedes long ago."

At Upsala, Harnack was occupied with discussing his cherished doctrinal authority — Marcion. Of this more anon.

The lectures at Lund covered subjects lying at the circumference of Christianity or having a purely historic interest. But the lecture on the Lord's Prayer seemed to be of special importance to Editor Svensson. He says: "One remark in our celebrated guest's discourse we would especially underscore. Our Bible critics here in Sweden have often stressed the somewhat dissimilar phrasing of the Lord's Prayer in Matthew and in Luke as a proof that the Bible cannot be infallible, because Christ could not have expressed Himself in such an unlike manner. But on this point the master does not exactly share his disciple's view. True, he did not express himself clearly, but it appeared that he was of the opinion that Christ taught His disciples this prayer on two occasions. In Matthew it is a form of prayer, but in Luke it is a confessional prayer, which distinguishes the disciples of Jesus from those of John. So far we could endorse Harnack's opinion, if that really had been his view. But after the remark just noted he fairly turned a somersets and gave an explanation of the original wording of the prayer. And now he disapproved of both Matthew and Luke. They had both given a faulty rendering of the Savior's words. Harnack now presented the prayer in its original form. It ran thus: 'Father, hallowed be Thy name; give us to-day our bread for to-morrow; and forgive us our sin, for we will also forgive every one who has transgressed against us; and lead us not into temptation.' Professor Pfannenstiel thanked the lecturer in a flowery speech. We hold that Professor Pfannenstiel himself delivers much more remarkable lectures than Harnack delivered in our country. So there is no need of importing more Bible critics. An author in a Skaane paper gives an enthusiastic report of the blessed impression he received from Harnack's lecture: he felt himself extremely comforted because of the prayer of Socrates to Pan and other gods which a docent at Lund had taught him. This is the prayer: 'Give me, O God, inner beauty and also an outward one in keeping therewith, and of earthly blessings give me as much as suffices for those who are content. Let me always regard wisdom as a good fortune in this world.' The admirer of Harnack adds: 'This is just the prayer which modern men need every day.' We cannot refrain from saying to the writer in the dialect of his country, that in our opinion 'the modern man' of Skaane must be a 'veritable heathen.'*

* For the correct rendering of these references to the Skaane dialect grateful acknowledgment is herewith rendered to Rev. Carl J. Segerhammar, B. D., of St. Louis.

“On the day after Harnack’s departure Editor Svensson received a letter from a pastor in Goteborg, with a request for a special service which the writer solicited because of what the German theologian had said in Sweden. The following portion of the letter is reprinted in *Nya Vaektaren*: ‘Prof. Adolph von Harnack denies the miracle of our Lord’s resurrection, yea, he has even gone so far as to declare the desire for an immortal existence an egoistic wish (der egoistische Wunsch nach unsterblicher Dauer). What a horrible statement! This herald of unbelief, then, goes so far in his audacity as to term a person who earnestly seeks salvation an egoist. Accordingly, the fruit of the gracious work of God’s Spirit on a person’s heart, in Harnack’s view, is to be declared egoism. What strengthening will not crass unbelievers and godless persons receive from such a statement! How evil is not his action by which he wounds the sincere faith and trust of childhood in our great High Priest and Mediator Jesus Christ! A theologian on whom God has bestowed great gifts must not go unrebuked when he subverts the foundation and draws many after him who are worldly-minded and are thus given a greater support for their unbelief and sinful security. He must not help the enemy of souls to cause temptations and inward conflicts to men who are earnestly seeking after salvation.’

“When one reads and sees how Harnack depreciates Holy Scripture, handles it recklessly, and talks of it as a work of mere men, I recall what that man of God, the great theologian Bengel, says in his *Scripture Thoughts*, p. 27: ‘The entire Scriptures, from Moses to the Revelation of John, are the only weapon with which believers have fought their way through their enemies. Everything in it is God’s Word, and every soul can rely on it with mountain firmness.’

“Is it conceivable that divine realities will unlock their essence and disclose their inward beauty and wealth for which they are intended to a person who, without any deeper interest in the matter, without reverence for it, yea, perhaps without an inkling of their sacred and sublime character, undertakes, from motives which at the bottom are carnally selfish, not to say hostile, to handle the heavenly flower of Christianity, to mangle it with the dissecting knife of science, and to examine its parts through spectacles of a prejudiced and unfriendly criticism? No, here the well-known saying of Pascal is applicable: ‘Human objects one must know in order to love them; divine objects, however,

one must love in order to know them.' Or I may recall a few other, older sayings of two great and profound thinkers of the Church in the Middle Ages: 'I do not seek to understand in order that I may believe, but I believe in order that I may understand.' (Anselm.) 'God is known in the same degree as He is loved.' (Bernard of Clairvaux.)

"In this glorious Lententide, when we study our suffering Redeemer and cannot sufficiently thank God for all that He has done to save us, it affects one very painfully to hear wanton modern rationalism raise its voice and put the men of this world still more to sleep."

Editor Svensson remarks: "These are true words, which deserve to be heeded. If throughout our country there were found many pastors with such clear vision, the situation would look different. But Lindblom, Wetter, and others will not furnish for ordination many candidates with such faith in God's Word."

However, the severest rebuff was administered to Harnack in the following editorial in *Nya Vaektaren*:—

"Marcion and Harnack.

"About the year 140 there came to Rome, from the town of Sinope in Pontus, a well-to-do ship-owner by the name of Marcion, who joined the Christian congregation at that place. Before this he had belonged to the congregation in his home town, of which his father was bishop. However, the father had excommunicated his son from the congregation for a cause that is no longer known with certainty. Tertullian's report that the excommunication was caused by the fact that Marcion had seduced a virgin consecrated to the Lord may be understood as an allegorical description of the man's later activity as an errorist in spreading dangerous heresies in the virgin Church.

"The congregation at Rome could not rejoice over the newly acquired member. Marcion was indeed a highly-gifted person, but he was very much inclined to speculation, and when at Rome he came under the influence of the Syrian Gnostic Cerdo, it did not take long before he rose in the congregation to voice most unheard-of errors, for which he was, four years after entering the congregation, excommunicated for all time from the Christian Church, from whose teaching he had broken away entirely in every essential point. Marcion really founded a new religion. True, his teaching retained much that was Christian and took in a great

deal of Gnosticism, but it can be reasonably asserted that his doctrine is neither Christianity nor Gnosticism. In conformity with the Gnostics he believed in more than one divine power. The God of the Old Testament, he claimed, was another than the God who has revealed Himself in Christ. The God of the Old Testament was portrayed as nothing but strict righteousness. He was declared to be, in a manner, leagued with hell and a declared enemy of the God who has been revealed in Christ and who is altogether goodness and grace. Naturally, Marcion rejected the writings of the Old Testament. He even cast aside the holy writings of the New Testament in their original form. Of the gospels he acknowledged only Luke and of Paul's epistles only ten. But the writings which he did accept he altered and revised to make them fit into his system of teaching. Only the Epistle to Philemon escaped revision.

"The greatest teachers of the Church had to meet in conflict more than once with Marcion and his followers, who organized congregations of their own in several places and, in general, distinguished themselves by their firmness in confessing their belief and by steadfastness in the persecutions which at that time swept over the Church. For in these persecutions the pagans did not discriminate between Marcionites and Christians. The steadfastness of the Marcionites had a bewildering effect on more than one person. For this reason men like Ireneus and Tertullian had to come forward with vigor and prove that a person who rejected the Holy Scriptures with the exception of the Epistle to Philemon, moreover, who absolutely denied that Christ truly became man, and also departed from the teaching of Scripture in most other points, could not be anything else than an antichrist.

"Thus Marcion's teaching was gradually overcome and extirpated, although it continued for some time. For as late as the year 900 Marcionites are occasionally mentioned as a little dying sect.

"Who would have believed that Marcion and his teaching were to find a mighty champion in our century? That is what has actually happened. It will certainly be conceded that in more than one respect there exists a remarkable friendship between Marcion and the Bible critics of our time, although they do not by any means operate after the same method or from the same starting-point. We pointed out this fact several years ago in an article entitled 'Modern Gnosticism,' and took the liberty to predict that the day would come when people would no longer be able

to close their eyes to this fact. But we did not believe that we would prove a prophet to the extent that we actually did.

"For — hear and marvel! — in a treatise under the caption 'Marcion, the Gospel of the Foreign God,' the well-known German theologian Adolph von Harnack has heralded himself as a devoted admirer and — under the supposition that Harnack still retains anything of positive faith — as a follower of Marcion and his teaching. It is a matter of history that Archbishop Nathan Soederblom has referred to Harnack with these words: 'He is the greatest theologian of our time, and his is one of the great names in the history of Christian culture.'

"The treatise of Harnack just mentioned is not a hasty work. It is the fruit of more than fifty years of thought and research on the subject and has now been given to the public, after the author is over seventy years old. Accordingly, we are justified in viewing this treatise as the ripe fruit of the German court theologian's research.

"In every essential point Harnack agrees with Marcion in contradistinction to the Christian Church, although he believes that the man was ahead of his time and did things in the year 200 that should have taken place at least a thousand years later. Marcion believed that in the Old Testament we meet a different spirit from that in the Gospel (let us remember, however, that Marcion altered even the Gospel), and that for this reason the Old Testament ought to be rejected. Harnack now puts the question in his book, Was Marcion right? And his answer is certainly remarkable and illuminating as regards both Harnack's position and the position of those who in our country have shown themselves to be his disciples and admirers. Here, then, is the answer of the German so much admired by our archbishop: 'To reject the Old Testament in the second century was a mistake, which the Church was right in not endorsing; to retain the Old Testament in the sixteenth century was a fate which the Reformation could not escape; but to preserve it still in the nineteenth century as a canonical document of Protestantism is due to a religious and ecclesiastical weakness.'

"Well, then! Harnack does not for a moment believe in the divine origin of the Old Testament, yet he holds that the Christian Church of the second century had to believe it, and that Luther must be pardoned for having believed it; but as regards ourselves, we must reject it. Reject it? How dared I write this? By no means, says Harnack; nobody thinks of rejecting the Old Testa-

ment. On the contrary, we shall give it to our time, and this is the way it shall be done: "This book will not be esteemed and valued in its peculiarity and importance until its *canonical* authority, which does not belong to it, is taken away."

"Accordingly, the great theological misleader of our time has now found it opportune to serve us his whole *menu* at once. Heretofore it was only one or the other of the imprecatory psalms or some inaccuracy in history, geography, or natural history in the Old Testament that we were told we must give up and to which our congregations must not stick if we wished to win many people for Christianity. And a host of small theologians believed this. But now we are given clearer information: The entire Old Testament must be given up as a canonical document. The same old reason why this should be done is given. In Harnack's opinion most of the objections which the masses raise against Christianity are based on the fact that the Church would still have the Old Testament regarded as great. 'To do away with it, certainly,' says Harnack, 'that is the great task which is demanded of Protestantism to-day.' Rarely has Satan spoken plainer language. When we reflect that it is to Protestant theologians and pastors that his servants are coming with this tempting suggestion, we can understand that the night is drawing near, and it is growing dark even now.

"Marcion rejected the Gospel. He produced another himself and proclaimed it. In this enterprise Harnack would have us follow the ancient heretic from the times of the martyrs. The reason given is that this is the only thing people will listen to. We read: 'Marcion's manner of proclaiming the Gospel meets the need of our time remarkably well; perhaps also for the reason that his age was related to ours. Those who best understand the soul of the people assure us that only the preaching of love, which does not damn, but help, has any prospect of obtaining hearers.'

"Alas! there is a great deal of truth in the statement that our time demands a gospel of the flesh; but it is a black, devilish lie that the Gospel which eliminates references to damnation is a Gospel that helps and saves.

"Well, we shall not call further attention to Harnack's new book. We have far more reason to devote our attention to those who repeat his teaching and to his disciples, who are riding on his mission here in our country, and, as far as they may and dare, are 'watering the rosebush from the fountain until it shall burst

into bloom.' We have now an authoritative statement regarding the blessing with which modern theology would make us happy. It is the old rotten heresy against which the foremost teachers of the martyr Church had to fight. It is a species of Gnosticism and nothing else. It is high time for the Swedish Church to give real proof of the fact that there is still some vital energy remaining in her."

The situation in Sweden which we have glimpsed in the foregoing is only a segment cut out of a film that runs around the earth in every direction. The experiences which confessing Christians and Lutherans in Gustavus Adolphus's country are making with leaders in the Church, great names in the domain of theology, and their mediocre or mercenary following, is typical of what their brother confessors of God's Word, of Luther's doctrine pure, are experiencing in other lands. It helps to establish between them the best comradeship there can be in this world: the comradeship of the Cross, in which each burden-bearer cheers the other and heartens him for his difficult task. Another lesson that may be culled from the foregoing account is a lesson of publicity, pitiless, fearless, persistent publicity. The men who reject God in His Word and testimony, who excoriate the Creed of Christendom by cutting the everlasting Gospel of the Savior and His atoning sacrifice by His vicarious living and dying out of it, deserve to be "marked," as the apostle demands, Rom. 16, 17. Let no one who has taken his place among the watchmen on the walls of Zion fail in his duty of signaling the approaching danger by a clear blast from the trumpet, call the enemy by name, and properly label the heresies that are being canvassed. Is. 56, 10, 11: "His watchmen are blind; they are all ignorant, they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber. Yea, they are greedy dogs, which can never have enough, and they are shepherds that cannot understand; they all look to their own way, every one for his gain, from his quarter." Phil. 3, 2: "Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision!" Rev. 22, 15: "For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie." 1 Cor. 14, 8: "For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?"
