

**SCIENCE IN THEOLOGY.  
SERMONS PREACHED IN  
ST. MARY'S, OXFORD,  
BEFORE THE UNIVERSITY**

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**ADAM S. FARRAR**

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SERMONS,

PREACHED BEFORE THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD.

SCIENCE IN THEOLOGY.

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SERMONS

PREACHED IN ST. MARY'S, OXFORD,

BEFORE THE UNIVERSITY.

BY

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## P R E F A C E.

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THE title, "Science in Theology," is intended to express the writer's purpose in the composition of the following Sermons, viz., to bring some of the discoveries and methods of the Physical and Moral Sciences to bear upon theoretic questions of Theology.

The history of the growth of systematic theology on the one hand, and of religious scepticism on the other, exhibits marked traces of the constant presence of an element which may be called Science in Theology. From the time that Theology first arose out of Religion, the speculative theory out of the practical art, it has never failed to receive a tinge from the condition of general knowledge existing, and the methods for the investigation of truth prevalent, in each particular age. Itself a kind of

science,—so far as systematic arrangement of principles can constitute science,—it has shared the fate of the other sciences ; it has been compelled to take its place among them, and has met with opposition, or has received illustration from them. Its history is marked by epochs of criticism or of scepticism, in which it has had to submit to the investigations of co-ordinate bodies of Physical or Mental Philosophy, sometimes refuting them, sometimes borrowing from them, at other times surrendering to them. In each of these epochs the difficulties presented have been grounded in some form of Science or Philosophy which has been brought to bear upon Christian Theology ; in each of them the restoration or the perpetuation of Christian belief has depended upon the readjustment of the new form of thought with the claims of pre-existent religious dogmas. The battle has been metaphysical or scientific, not strictly theological. It has been fought in reference to the premises from which the sceptics or critics have started, not to the conclusions at which they have arrived.

In the early centuries, for example, Theology received a tinge from contact with the allegorizing philosophy of Alexandria, which expressed itself in the writings of Origen. That learned man could



not lay aside his favorite habits of thought, but strove to adjust Christian speculations to them. During the two centuries which followed his time, Theology came into conflict with the Neo-Platonic philosophy,\* and in the conflict came forth victorious from the first great historical epoch of scepticism. In the middle ages it encountered a new danger, a second crisis, from the criticism of Nominalists like Abelard, in the University of Paris;† and it received a new adjustment with the existing state of thought through means of the logical arrangements of the Schoolmen, such as Anselm and Aquinas.‡ At the era of the Renaissance it encountered new difficulties in being brought into contact with the wider knowledge which Providence, from time to time, disclosed to mankind—difficulties which have not, like the more ancient ones previously noticed, quickly expired, but have left their effects to the present day. The sacred books were then, for the first time, exposed to the criticism of great scholars and editors, and alarm was excited by the discovery of variety of readings in the text. Received dog-

\* See Sermon V (pp. 142-146) of this volume.

† See Sir J. Stephen's "Lectures on the History of France" (vol. ii, first Lecture on the Power of the Pea).

‡ See Sermon VI, pp. 171, 172.

mas also were submitted to the acute controversies generated by the Reformation, and while undergoing revision from that movement the terminology in which they were expressed became stereotyped in the mode that might be expected from an era of religious struggle.\* In the early part of the seventeenth century the discoveries in Physical Science also began to unveil new truths to the minds of the orthodox. Metaphysical Science likewise,

\* It was an age when theologians had not time for careful thought, even if the state of scholarship had been sufficiently advanced to supply them with the materials for it. This, however, was not the case. In the world of scholars there were indeed giants in those days—Erasmus, Budeus, the Stephensens, the Scaligers, &c.—but their attention was devoted mainly to *words*. The scholars of the seventeenth century applied themselves rather to *things*. On the foundation thus prepared, the German scholars of the last and present century have been able to found accurate sciences of language and of criticism. While, therefore, we justly render all honor to the noble efforts of the theologians of the era of the Reformation, we ought not to suppose that they, with their imperfect attainments, were infallible interpreters of the sacred Scriptures, nor to allow their views to be an impediment to the theological progress which Providence is forcing on the world by the advance in knowledge, to a portion of which allusion has been made. The stand-point of the sixteenth century had its value; it was a noble protest against mediæval Christianity, an epoch in spiritual emancipation; but it was not the same as the stand-point of the first century, and for this reason, as well as for the others just named, it is not sufficiently broad and simple and learned to be the stand-point of the nineteenth.

in opening up investigations into the origin of knowledge, led through the spread of Sensationalism to a new, the third, epoch of religious scepticism, which is generally identified with the name of Voltaire and the contemporary philosophers of France. It is unnecessary to point out the intellectual and moral means by which Theological Science outlived this new crisis. The battle was again fought on Scientific ground, not on Theological. Lastly, the convergence of different lines of thought in the present day; of the Intellectualism of Germany\* and the Positivism of France; of religious dogmatism and scientific scepticism; and the existence of apparent discrepancies between Theology and the Sciences, are producing a fresh era of criticism, a fresh crisis of doubt. Theology must again listen to secular discoveries, must refute them or readjust its doctrines and its methods to them; and the humblest attempts, made without sophistry, in an honest and loving temper, to aid in such a desirable result, must surely be useful.

The history thus given of Science in Theology, *i. e.* of the relation which Science, Physical and

\* This term is intended to include the Spiritualist tendencies of the followers of Schelling, as well as the Rationalist followers of Kant and Hegel.