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DR. SCHAFF AND THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH.

BY REV. THOMAS JOSEPH SHAHAN, D.D.

More eloquent tongues than mine have already paid due tribute to the memory of the venerable scholar, whose great learning and manly virtues we can all unite in praising, without regard to religious or scientific differences, however profound and essential they may be. I will not dwell upon the historical training, the grasp of scientific method, and the ripe scholarship which were distinctive of Dr. Schaff, nor upon his sincere sympathy for the spiritual and religious element in the history of human thought, nor upon the uprightness of his historical conscience, and his desire to be objective and candid in the statement of views which were not his own,—these are the primary qualities which we demand of a Church historian, and especially of one who assumes the delicate and responsible office of an historian of theology. You have requested me to speak of the deceased in his relations with the Catholic Church, and I propose to confine myself to a brief enumeration of the motives why that Church respects such men as Dr. Schaff. He devoted his life in a great measure to the history, the theology, and the original texts and sources of the earliest Christian ages, those distant but all important years when the foundations of the Catholic Church were being sunk, and the great beams were being laid on which she has since arisen. He endeavored to bring back the minds of men to a consideration of those primitive days when there was but one spirit and one heart in the Christian body, when belief and discipline, religious life and organization, were substan-

tially of the same type in all the Christian communities. Such literary labors have always been in honor in the Catholic Church. She sees with satisfaction this return to the study of her origins, and is confident that it will end eventually in an historical justification of many doctrines and customs for which she has been made to suffer severely. I need only point to the conduct of Leo XIII., whose elevated and luminous language on the study of Church history, and whose conduct in throwing open the greatest repository of Church documents, the Vatican Archives, to the researches of the scholars of every creed and race are sufficient proof of the practical interest which the Catholic Church actually takes in such matters. Dr. Schaff himself was enabled to make use of this venerable collection, and, if I remember well, took occasion to express his gratitude therefor in a learned communication to the *Presbyterian Review*.

On different occasions the deceased, it is remembered with gratitude by Catholics, corrected misstatements of their doctrines, and rebuked exaggerated and false notions concerning them. They were then, as they are now, in a minority in this country, and it is an unhappy trait of human experience that minorities are too easily believed to be wrong, and their reasons to be as weak as their number is small. It is all the more honorable, I take it, if one who is on the popular and successful side lifts up a voice of protest in defence of the inalienable rights of truth and justice, whenever he sees a wrong done to these divine sisters.

Perhaps, if the opinions of this honorable assembly were individually taken, most would agree that the dominant desire in the heart of Dr. Schaff was the reunion of Christendom. His writings were meant by him to tone down the asperities of a secular polemic, to smooth out the rugged lines of doctrine and experience, to increase the sum of Christian charity, and pave the way for that blessed time when the centuries of dissension shall be forgotten in the plenitude of unity and love. The journeys he undertook, and the personal efforts he made to bring about some unity

within the circle of his own influence, are well known. The lives and writings of such men must be taken as a whole, not carpingly examined in detail, and I do not hesitate to say that from this view-point Dr. Schaff belongs in the same category with men like George Calixtus, Grotius, and Leibnitz, whose efforts for the reunion of Christians the Catholic Church remembers with sympathy, while she regrets their untimely failure.

The Catholic Church most ardently desires the healing of the religious divisions which so unhappily afflict Christendom. Before the Vatican Council Pius IX. made a formal appeal in this sense to all the separated brethren, and the constant efforts of the papacy to bring back to the original unity the churches of the Orient are well known. But while she believes that it must not be done at the sacrifice of what she considers to be principle and truth, she is only too glad to approve those previous conditions which Dr. Schaff sets down at the end of his little brochure on the Reunion of Christendom, and which may be said to sum up the results of his long and laborious efforts in this direction. In this last work of his pen he tell us that the preliminaries of so desirable an event must be the cultivation of an irenic spirit, the weeding out of prejudice, a willingness to allow for diversity of education and surroundings, co-operation in all that pertains to the common weal of humanity, an attentive study of Church history and comparative theology; above all, prayer. Surely if this state of mind ever obtains in any large measure, an Astræan reign will have set in, and we may look forward to the near realization of the prayer of Jesus Christ, efficacious and splendidly operative for a thousand years, that all might be one as He and the Father are one. In conclusion, I will say, that while the Catholic historian and theologian finds much from which he must dissent in the writings of Dr. Schaff, still, when he considers his natural and acquired abilities, his earnest zeal, his manliness, his astounding productivity, he is tempted to exclaim :

Talis cum sis, utinam noster esses.