

PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION.*—A recent writer in the *New York Critic*, after despatching an important work by one of the foremost scholars of this country in about a dozen contemptuous lines, utters the following remarkable dictum concerning the philosophy

* *Studies in Hegel's Philosophy of Religion*, with a Chapter on Christian Unity in America, by J. MACBRIDE STERRETT, D.D. New York: D. Appleton & Co.

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of Hegel: "It has had no profound influence on the general course of philosophic thought, and is not likely to have any." Evidently Dr. Sterrett does not agree with the dashing, self-confident judgment of the newspaper reviewer. Indeed his own book is, all of it, placed in evidence to the contrary. And so are the thought and writings of the many others to whom he refers; and who, although they object to being called *Hegelians*, in either the popular or the exact scientific sense of the name, recognize "Hegel's as the latest great epoch-making contribution to the philosophic interpretation of the world and comprehension of humanity's experience" (p. 7).

Dr. Sterrett's book contains eight chapters. Of these the first three are introductory; they discuss Hegelianism and its different schools, the growth of the philosophy of religion, and Hegel's conception of religion. The remaining chapters are devoted to the consideration of the nature of religion, its classes, the comparative method of its study, and Christianity as the "absolute religion."

The author has two principal aims, which he follows almost *pari passu*, as it were. Of these, one is the interpretation of Hegel's views on this great subject (the philosophy of religion) so as to render them intelligible to English readers. But he assures us that the book is no "mere expository paraphrase of Hegel." His other aim is, therefore, to exercise his own freedom of thought in "new inferences and applications suggested by the text." A single aim binds together these two; and this we may state in the author's own glowing language:—"to discover the concrete Infinite immanent in, vitalizing and educating man throughout his history; to maintain the essential kinship of man with God; to insist upon religion being the mutual reconciliation and communion of God and man, makes the whole world kin, and binds it with chains of gold to the head and heart as well as to the feet of God."

In our judgment the most interesting and satisfactory chapter of the book is that entitled—"Theology, Anthropology, and Pantheism." In this chapter Dr. Sterrett takes the entirely justifiable position that no thinker is to be called a "pantheist" who maintains that God is self-conscious, personal, Absolute Being,—Subject and Spirit and not merely Substance; and who also maintains the real and morally free personality, and not mere individuality of man. If this be pantheism, then, says the author:

“Nearly every great saint of the intellect and heart in the church can thus be accused of pantheism.” The view which identifies God with Absolute Substance without affirming, or while, at the same time, denying his Personality, *is* “atheistic pantheism.” And the view of God which supralapsarian Calvinism takes *is* “unethical pantheism.”

While approving Dr. Sterrett’s views as to what is and what is not “obnoxious pantheism,” we cannot share fully in his confidence that Hegel is throughout a consistent Theist. We are aware of the many apparently clear declarations, in the writings of the German thinker, which may be quoted in support of this confidence. But, then, we find so many other declarations about the ultimate meaning and implications of which we are not sure. In our judgment, it still remains an open question what was Hegel’s last word, as understood in its most esoteric meaning, on this all-important subject. But to cry “pantheism” at those who understand and approve of Hegel’s views on the philosophy of religion, as Dr. Sterrett and many others understand and approve them, may well provoke the retort of Carlyle: “No! I am not a *pan*-theist, nor a *pot*-theist either.”

The style of this book is bold, warm, fluent. Its author puts his heart as well as his mind into his noble theme. The result is a work which is well worthy of attention from all those who are interested in bringing the profoundest things of reason into union with the demands of essential religious faith and religious life.