THE BIBLE AND CRITICISM

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FOUR LECTURES

BY

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PREFACE.

THESE Lectures were delivered, at the English Presbyterian College, London, to an audience of young men, belonging to various professions and walks in life. They are published in compliance with the custom of the Lecture.

Some readers may naturally think that the subject invited, or even demanded, a historical sketch of the attitude of Criticism towards the Bible — for example, since the Reformation. Such a narrative could certainly be made interesting and suggestive. The reason for not attempting it, apart from all question of the Lecturer's competency for the task, is this: the story could not be told without constantly expressing, or implying, a judgment on the merits of critical opinions; while it would have been

impossible, within the limits, to carry home to the understanding of the audience an intelligent apprehension of the grounds of judgment. So executed, the Lectures might store the memory, and perhaps bias the judgment; but they would not be fitted to awaken and educate mind—the end which the author felt bound to aim at in addressing young men, however imperfectly he has attained it.

Apology is due for omission of References to Notes in Appendix, arising from distance from press. Appendix A should have been referred to on p. 27; B, on p. 71; the references at foot of p. 125 should have been to C and D; and D should have been again referred to on p. 137.

CONTENTS.

I.

INTRODUCTORY.

I.

IN these Lectures I mean to move within a rather definite and limited circle. I do not attempt to reckon with all the various points of view that may be assumed. I suppose myself to be speaking to believers, and to believers of the type and cast of conviction which prevails in our churches. I take for granted that such persons, as Protestants, do, in the first place, recognise the Scriptures as their rule of faith; and, in the second place, claim a right, also, to take an interest in discussions that bear on the character and trustworthiness of the Scriptures. More particularly, I suppose that the stir which is abroad with respect to Biblical questions has reached us all, and has produced in some, at any rate, a measure of perplexity, or anxiety, about the right ground for us to take, and about the opinions we should form of the ground taken by others. I imagine myself, then, in con-

ference with you on such topics; and now I state to you some views which occur to me. They are suggested, as usual in such cases, partly by reflection on what I know of the subject-matter, and partly by what I see, or believe, to be passing in the minds of others. In doing this, my object is not to propound any complete and finished theory, nor to convert you to such a theory; it is rather to throw out impressions as to current aspects of the case, and the way in which they may reasonably be regarded. To attempt more on such a subject, in the limits I must observe here, would be unreasonable. But I think good may be done, at the point which things have reached, by comparing notes, as it were, about the elements we have got to deal with, and the way in which these stand related to one another.

In order, however, to do this for any good purpose — or, at any rate, to accomplish the purpose which I have in view — it will be necessary to say things that are very elementary. I must trust to the forbearance of many persons whom I see here, to pardon me for moving much in a region in which they have nothing to learn from any one, far less from me. But, indeed, I have been in some degree disposed to venture on the subject

which I have selected, by this very circumstance, that it is a subject on which I am not entitled to speak magisterially. Criticism is not my special department. I am in sympathy with those of you who feel that you have not time or opportunity to master, as you would wish, the array of questions belonging to this department. Those questions interest us all. I, like others, have attended to them as much as I could. But on many of them my position must be provisional. I have not had time to master the accomplishments, or form the habits of mind, which qualify a man to speak as an expert, conversant at first hand with all the kinds of evidence adduced in connection with these questions. Therefore I feel myself more in sympathy with the great mass of believers, who, with various advantages or disadvantages, must occupy substantially the same position.

You will not be surprised that I add this *caveat*. I am not to be understood as deciding questions, which are at present awaiting decision before the courts of my own church. Sometimes I may seem to do so, but only to those who overlook two distinctions. On the one hand, when I dissent from an opinion, I do not thereby decide whether or not it is or should be a forbidden opinion in any of the churches. On the other hand, when I recognise an

opinion as in general compatible with faith, and with useful service to the common cause, I do not thereby decide whether it is or should be free to men to teach it in my own church. There are opinions held by many devoted Christian men which are not compatible with the terms of ministerial communion in this church or in that.

We start, then, from common ground,—the ground of faith. The Scriptures of the Old and New Testament we receive as the body of inspired writings, wherein God reveals Himself to us, and speaks with us concerning faith and practice. That we have here an authoritative revelation from God, making known to us the most material steps of His dealings with men, making known to us His character and ours, making known to us redemption in Christ, the promise of the Spirit, and whatever else belongs to salvation, — is most surely believed among us. The kinds of evidence which build up in our minds the conviction that this remarkable Book is *so* remarkable, are various. There is, for instance, a wonderful historical substructure, quite certain in its substance, whatever particular parts of it may be called in question. That lays a strong hold upon our minds; for in it we find ourselves confronted by a disposition of things running down the

ages, which even of itself bespeaks a peculiar manifestation of God. Then, the series of testimonies coming forth in connection with this history, as they draw from it a providential corroboration, and set forth for it a self-evidencing meaning and explanation, so they reach home into our hearts; they make us aware that here we have to do, not only with history and its developments, but also with Him who is above history, before it, and after it,—the unchanging Lord of souls. Here, also, a place is found for the proof arising from God's signs and wonders; which, however underrated by the fashion of the times, will maintain its own great place in the Christian argument, just as it holds that place in the Scriptures. Then we come to all the various forms and branches of internal and experimental evidence, on which I do not dwell. But the conclusive proof, to which all these minister in their place (which is also the most widely available), arises by our discernment of a divine witness in the truths which the Scriptures set forth. Christ, for instance, when we are enabled to see Him as the Scriptures set Him forth, is His own witness. And here it must be added, that our convictions and impressions are not confined to the great truths—the materials, so

to say, of the Scriptures. There is an evidence, not only for Christianity, but for Scripture too, in the Scripture itself. The Scripture speaks to us and in us, so as to single itself out from other writings and persuade us that it is no mere work of man. Certainly we do not mean that every separate fragment of the Scriptures could be recognised by us, on the strength of this intrinsic evidence. It is the Scripture taken together, and as it hangs together, and is of a piece, of which this is said. But still we mean that we have not only a doctrine, or the materials of a faith, in connection with which we apprehend God's mind and heart; but we acknowledge a divine record of it, which speaks with authority and power the truth as it is in Jesus.

How much precisely is to be ascribed to the Scripture, and each passage of it, in conformity with this conviction, cannot be settled on this mere ground alone. All I say is, that this conviction settles the general attitude occupied by Christian minds towards the Bible, and the kind of expectation which Christians cherish in connection with it. Their attitude toward the Bible I may describe as a disposition to lean upon it with loving confidence, and to submit to it with unreserved deference. And their expectation has been to find in the Bible

a clear and sufficient guide to God, and to the doing of God's will. It is vain to think that believing men will easily submit to be driven from this apprehension of the Scriptures, and this use of them. And that remains true, though it is true also that discipline, from various quarters, and of various kinds, has been all along employed to teach them, that they may too easily force their own conceptions on the Scriptures; and that they may fail to understand how the Scriptures are to be used for support, and for submission, and for guidance. That discipline is not to drive them from their confidence; though it is to make them considerate and humble in the responsibilities they lay on the Word of God, and in the inferences they draw from the persuasion about it which they are taught to cherish.

But, looking from this point of view, we find ourselves called to reckon with the conclusions or indications of criticism. Criticism, we find, has much to say about books of the Bible and statements in the Bible. And some of the things which criticism says, or at least which are said in its name, create, in various degrees, discomfort. There are those who, in the name of criticism, undertake to subvert essentials and fundamentals of Christianity, or of the historical substructure on which it reposes. What is

maintained by them is palpably and completely opposed to Christian faith. Questions thus arising often occasion anxiety to individuals, to those especially who, in the course of forming or revising their opinions, have been led to examine the various branches of the Christian evidence. But yet, I think, these are not the questions and assertions which give most trouble to Christians, and to the churches. That character belongs rather to those conclusions, announced in the name of criticism, about which it is debated how far they can be harmonised with faith. Can I receive them, and yet continue to use the Bible as Christians do? These are the more vexatious questions. For really, however certain it is that we shall continue to have infidels, and among them some men of great ability and high character, this must be said, that there is not the least risk of criticism, or anything else, ever shaking down that array of evidence, which has, in every age, proved enough to maintain or corroborate the faith of Christians. It is really idle to speak of it. Nor are we bound to contemplate, even in argument, the possibility of changes upon the canon, and transformations on the constitution and contents of the Bible. Some books of the canon have far stronger historical evidence than others. But beyond all reasonable doubt,

admitting, for the sake of argument, some giving and taking about the margins, the Bible must remain as it is, whatever is to be thought of it, and however it is to be used. These, or very nearly these, are the writings we have got to deal with. But solicitude is more awakened, when views claim acceptance, of which it is feared that they make dangerous concessions or approximations to the enemy; that they virtually give up the Christian position, or some essential part of it. It is not that the Christian revelation is going to be rejected, but that its singularity and glory are in danger of being lowered; and that a very modified view is going to be entertained of what it is, how it was given, how it is related to other sources of knowledge within or without. This is what is feared. In short, men apprehend one degree or another of what is designated by that vague yet useful word, "rationalism."

And even where no very great degree of that can reasonably be imputed, those who love the Bible are apt to be impatient at the substance and the manner of questions raised. Criticism comes in with assertions based on microscopic points, that have no apparent connection with edification; it takes liberties with things that the Christian heart delights to reverence. To

be obliged to think whether something is true about a minute point in the Bible, which is difficult to harmonise with Christian faith and devoutness, is discomposing, even if the difficulty is successfully solved. Why torment us with it? Or, if unbelievers will make work of that kind, why should those who are not unbelievers help them? If the Bible be the Bible, let us have the comfort of using it for our daily necessities without disturbance.

However these things may be, one thing must be said. It would be a great mistake to look upon criticism as only a source of troubles and difficulties for people who read their Bibles. Criticism has performed, and continues to perform, the most essential service to the Christian cause. It both enables us to construct our historical evidences, and it throws light in a thousand ways upon the Bible and its teaching. There may be those who do not want to be troubled with it, and who would willingly part with its aid if they could at the same time get rid of its embarrassments. These are not wise Christians. And there may be others who are very willing to take the aid of criticism, if only they may be allowed to shut their eyes when its aspect becomes less helpful. Those are not honest Christians. Either way, there is no help for it. This is one of the things we must

reckon with, and the more deliberately and calmly the better.

But now, what thing is this criticism with which we find ourselves dealing? You hear of "Biblical" criticism. But note this first; criticism has no peculiar connection with the Bible. It is a science or art which has reference to literature as such; having most to do, indeed, in the field of ancient literature, but being in its own nature applicable to literature of any period. And, looking at it in this width of reference and application, let me begin by saying that there are some things with which criticism has much to do, with which it is yet not to be confounded. For example, it is not to be confounded with the science of interpretation, or the exact and scholarly unfolding of a writer's meaning. Sometimes the word is used widely, so as to include that department of scholarship; but we do not employ it so. As we shall see, criticism employs interpretation or exegesis, whenever it wants it, as one of the methods for getting at materials and sifting them. And the more completely the objects of criticism are to be accomplished, the more carefully and thoroughly must interpretation be employed. But for our present purpose we distinguish the one from the other. Again, criticism may be taken to denote another art: that which lays

down rules for appreciating the beauty and perfection of literary compositions, and applies such rules in order to judge the merits of books in that respect. We dismiss this sense, too. Criticism, as we understand it, may borrow for its purposes from the quarter just named, but only as it borrows from every quarter. For our purposes it is reasonable and convenient to take the word as indicating a kind of work, clearly enough distinguishable from both of these.

But at this point perhaps I had better look round for an example. It is generally a good thing to come from what is vague and strange, to what we know by experience. Criticism is associated with regions of learning, of which some of us do not know much. Yet you may know well enough what criticism is, in all its chief processes, if you ever undertook to arrange bundles of old letters: a family correspondence, I will suppose, that has got mixed, and is to be sorted in chronological order. You may have, perhaps, some grounds to go upon, apart from and external to the documents to be arranged; some written memoranda of family history, or some recollection in your own memory. Or, perhaps, you have no such aid, and must rely on the letters alone. You find that some of the letters are fully dated, and that

there is no apparent reason why these dates should not be relied upon. These, then, become your fixed points. But many, perhaps, are communications which have no date, or only an imperfect date, such as the day of the week; and you cannot tell at first to what month or year, nor to what place of writing, to assign them. You set to work, however, and by help of their internal contents, combined with those of the letters whose dates are fixed, you get a good many placed in due relation in the series, and you get the date either fixed, or approximately indicated. The fuller and more exact your scheme of the correspondence, and of the family history, becomes, the more resource you have, from which to form a judgment of the place of each letter still outstanding. But in regard to some, you find that a very minute search for little indications, and a curious combination of such indications, derived from a number of letters and put together, proves the only means of solving your problem. Moreover, in order to fix the place of some letters, you find it needful to institute a scrutiny of the paper; and to observe tricks of style, and spelling, and handwriting, which, even in the same person, vary from one period of life to another. You help yourself out, also, with old newspapers, for the purpose of profiting by any allusions to events of the day

which the letters contain. In short, you exhaust every track of investigation. And by these means, we may suppose, a large number of letters are fairly and precisely fixed as to date and place; a considerable number are fixed with a high degree of probability, or fixed within limits; and a few stand out as problems unsolved, which might possibly be assigned to several different places in the series, and therefore cannot be fixed to any.

In such a process, your attention would be very closely applied to the family history to which the letters belong, and a certain kind of minute acquaintance with various things about it would be attained. Yet the manner of your attention to it, and the manner of your acquaintance with it, would be of a curiously disproportioned kind. At least both would be very different from that which would take place in some one, who, after you had arranged the correspondence, should study it because he sought the instruction it can yield to a student of human life; or, perhaps, because he loved some of the correspondents while they lived, and venerated them now when they were gone. Such a student, if he became aware of the facts which had been exercising *your* mind, without thinking of your objects, might be half amused and half provoked. "Why," he would say, "I find you all anxiety

to fix the meaning of one or two passing allusions, to some trial or crime, then interesting the public mind; or you are spending boundless pains to make sure whether a writer did not, at a given date, change his practice as to spelling 'Tyrol,' with a *y* or an *i* in the first syllable, and 'honour,' with or without a *u* in the second; and whether the practice was constant, before and after; or you are immensely absorbed in the question, when somebody had the whooping cough. What in the world does it matter! What a despicable set of trivialities to be allowed to occupy your mind!" And you would reply, "For your purpose, which is the higher and worthier one, that is all true; but for my purpose, which was to arrange and date the letters, these trifles proved to be vital; and if I had not arranged the letters, it would have been a very confused business for you to try to read them." And if he said, "Many thanks for arranging; but, really, supposing you had left some of the minor letters uncertain in their date, which you have succeeded at last in dating, by means of hours and days of poring over trifles, it would have been no great loss to any one;" your reply, again, would be, "When I undertook to arrange, and to place the contents in the fullest attainable light, I undertook to do it as thoroughly as it could be done. It was my business to attend to

all these things, if I was to undertake the job at all."

But we are not yet done with your practice of criticism. Possibly enough, you find yourself embarrassed, at certain stages of progress, by difficulties that puzzle you. Sets of letters claim, according to one set of signs, to fall into one order; according to another set of signs, into another. After various efforts, you find the explanation to be, that one of the dated letters, on which you had relied, is wrongly dated. It is dated in the year 1815; and by an induction of circumstances you satisfy yourself beyond doubt that it was written in 1816. Nay, you succeed in probably tracing the very history of the blunder. The letter was written on April 15, and the writer, in his haste, carried on the 15 in his head, and set it down again when writing the year. This clears up one complication. But it suggests to you a new track of inquiry. Perhaps this particular correspondent was apt to be careless, or absent-minded, in his dating of letters. You look at his other letters with a new scrutiny, and perhaps you come to be satisfied that in three other cases he made a mistake in his date. In one of these cases he is proved to have done it, by a reference in the letter to a public event, the date of which is fixed by a contemporary news-

paper. In another case you have no evidence of that kind, but yet you decide with confidence, because the letters about that period have baffled your attempts to arrange them; and by the assumption of an easily-supposable mistake, in the date of one letter of that same correspondent, the whole set falls into an obvious luminous order, which, once it is seen, proves itself. In another case yet, you have not even that evidence; still, by a correction of one date of the very same kind as in the other cases, some section of the correspondence, which before was somewhat stiff and not very natural, becomes at least easy and unembarrassed. So that here, also, the assumption of a blunder is at any rate probable.

So far you are supposed to be dealing with autographs. But let me suppose that part of your materials are not original letters, but copies, headed with the names of the various writers to whom they are ascribed; and suppose some part of the letters, whether original or copies, are in a foreign language, and bear to come from a foreign country; and suppose that some of them bear to be translations into English, of letters originally written in another language. Then you will see that it is possible that a much more extended range of questions, and of investigations for the purpose of solving

them, may arise. I will give two examples. First, you might find that you were obliged to raise the question, whether one or more of the copied letters was, in the copy, ascribed to its true author. A copyist, who has to make copies of several letters at a time, may, through inattention, set down at the head of one letter some other of the names which he has got accustomed to deal with, instead of the name to which that letter really belongs. Again, you might have to raise the question, whether some letter of the series was not a forgery—intended to deceive, written for the purpose of passing under the name of a person who did not write it. That is not likely to be common. But it might happen; and you might be able to demonstrate it by some trivial circumstance, of no account at all in a general estimate of the importance of things, but yet decisive of the authenticity of the letter.

I am nearly done now with this illustration. But I may add this yet further. In the course of all these comparisons and examinations you would naturally form a clear conception of the mental habits—some of them, at least—of the various correspondents. For instance, they might differ in their way of dealing with matters of fact. One might impress you with his strict care and veracity; another with his

heedlessness and inaccuracy, which had given you trouble, and put you on the wrong track on various occasions; another, still, with his proneness to gross exaggeration, or even to deliberate falsehood. And when you had made sure of any of these characteristics in instances where you could confront the letter-writers by other contemporary evidence, you would bear this remembrance with you in estimating the worth of their several statements about other matters.

Such might be some of the processes, such the kind of conclusions, to which you might be led in the case I have supposed. I need only add, that the conclusions at which you arrived might vary greatly in the degree of their certainty. Some, even though reached by rather subtle processes, might have the utmost strength and certainty, so that your confidence in them could not possibly be shaken; others could only pretend to various degrees of probability, and might be subject to much modification from fresh evidence. Also you can understand that you would be apt to fall in love with pet theories in regard to some of the difficulties, which you would be disposed to rate at more than they were worth, on account of the trouble and pains with which you had formed them.

You will also see that the very conception of

this process proceeds on the idea, that the documents you deal with are valuable, and deserve to have the utmost care and study spent upon them. It is quite true that such a critical study might be animated by a perverse design, merely to support some foregone conclusion. If a lawsuit happened to arise, into which the supposed correspondence entered as evidence, then, on one side or both, you might find the lawyers spending all their strength in critical reasonings on dates, and authorship, and interpretation; doing so to support one side of a case, rather than for the sake of getting at the exact truth. One of the lawyers might exert himself to destroy the credit and character of the whole correspondence, or the most material parts of it. That might be; but the critical care, in itself, is a tribute of care and of respect to the documents on which it is expended. It implies the importance of all that can be made sure about them.

Now let us pass from our illustration to the great field of literature, with its methods and results.

Criticism in its widest conception might be described to be the study of the manner of thinking and writing of the various ages and races of the world, with a view to put written records in their true historical place and to

furnish them with the proper historical lights. But this is rather too wide for convenience, and we shall lose nothing by narrowing the conception a little. Criticism, then, shall be described as the science of the means by which a book has its character and place in history determined.

As an art, criticism is a practical skill in the application of those means. I say "the book's place in history," for this, if it be well considered, covers much. Its date; its authorship; the relation in which its statements, its style, its thinking, stand to the modes of statement, and forms of style, and currents of thought of the past; the sources on which it draws; the effects it has produced; the notices of it that have occurred since its appearance; also the discrimination of its various parts, if perhaps different parts of it have to be ascribed to different sources and different periods, and have afterwards come together. All these things come in, either as ultimate objects of inquiry or as materials of evidence, requiring to be investigated and defined. Of course the interpretation of the book, the fixing of its precise meaning, is an important element in these investigations; and therefore is taken up into criticism, in so far as it yields materials bearing on the problems of criticism. So does the ex-

amination of the text with a view to settle what the tenor of the text originally was. And this, indeed, the settling of the text, is an independent object of criticism, for criticism exerts itself to fix what the book really is, as well as how it came to be; the first for the sake of the second, but also for its own sake independently.

It is partly because of the interest of criticism in the text of a book that I spoke of it as seeking to determine, not merely the book's place in history, but its "*character* and place in history." However, I had another reason for it. It falls into the sphere of criticism to look at the question, whether the book or the author has really had access to the sources of knowledge, or of authority, from which he professes to draw; and if he had, whether he has used them correctly. How far investigations of this kind should be carried, for the purposes of criticism, may depend on circumstances. In some instances it is the business of criticism to examine such questions minutely; in others, they are better left to the general process of historical investigation. But in so far as they are undertaken, they imply that the statements of the book are tested against collateral or independent sources of information, so that an appreciation of its moral and intellectual value, at least for some purposes, takes place and is recorded.

I have said that criticism is by no means an exclusively theological discipline; it pertains to literature, as one of the essential means by which a cultivated acquaintance with literature is maintained, and its methods have been applied and tested all over that wide field. It is true that in each particular department of literature, criticism has to take account of special conditions, and has to draw more amply on special departments of knowledge; and therefore in the theological and biblical applications of it, a set of special acquirements are demanded, by reason of which this becomes a very distinct branch of criticism. Still, criticism has its reason and value in the nature of literature as such; its grounds and laws arise from the consideration of the conditions under which literature, as a part of human history, has existed and has been handed down.

It is a long time since the methods of criticism began to be established and applied. Looking to more modern times, we may say that in the seventeenth century criticism began to shape itself to good degrees of insight and dexterity. But instances of dealing with critical problems, in a successful and useful way, could easily be produced from the sixteenth century. Since those times, the principles and methods of criticism have been ripened by use; and having been

applied over much wider fields, they ought to be by this time at once more flexible and more precise. One change, that has been going on since the earlier days of criticism, deserves perhaps some special attention. You will remember that I still speak as a man looking into the field of criticism from the outside, and therefore subject to correction.

A source of knowledge, available for the purposes of criticism, is found in the historical statements of earlier times about works and authors. Learned men of by-gone days have left statements about authors and their works; or they have referred to books, and given statements as to their origin and earlier history. Or, again, statements about books are made in the books themselves, in their titles, or in the body of them. Now it early became the business of critics to point out that those statements, in some instances, ought not to be believed, because they could positively be proved to be erroneous. But in the early days of criticism it was customary to pay a great deal of respect to old statements and traditions of learned men, when these were not manifestly untrue, or did not lead direct into some serious difficulty. It was the habit of a time grateful to the past for what it had handed down, and willing to presume accuracy and

fidelity, where the contrary did not appear. Now, however, a disposition has grown, as criticism has advanced, to decline to take statements of that kind on trust. Each statement of that kind is to be cross-questioned as to its source, as to the means of knowledge of the person who makes it, as to his nearness in time to the facts he mentions, as to his character for accuracy and for honesty, and as to the corroborations, if any, by which his testimony is confirmed. And ancient statements which are anonymous, or have the character of a general current tradition, have, for the most part, little weight laid upon them, except in so far as special circumstances may concur to render it probable that the tradition was early and uncontradicted, and improbable that it could have existed at all unless it had been grounded on facts. This implies no decision, you observe, to the effect that the statements in question are false. So far the critic is only saying, "They may be false or true; but they can be no ground of knowledge to me, nor supply a foundation to build critical beliefs upon, unless they stand the tests which it is my duty to apply to them." The result is that early historical statements which thoroughly well stand these tests have, if possible, an increased weight ascribed to them, compared with

what they had in the earlier days of criticism—at all events, they retain undiminished weight. Nothing is so valuable in criticism as firm historical ground. But a great deal of material has greatly fallen in value, and an increased relative weight has come to be awarded to what I may call the evidence of signs, as compared with the evidence of articulate historical witnesses. Finding a great deal of professed historical evidence to be worth little, the critic is all the more disposed to make much of signs, which he thinks less likely to deceive him. Those signs are facts or circumstances about the books themselves. Books, like coins, have signs of age and origin upon them. There are signs by which you fix the age—*i.e.*, the place in history—of a manuscript more or less exactly, reserving always the question whether it has not been forged with false signs, to imitate an age to which it does not belong. So, when you come to the matter of a book, you may form a judgment from the words it uses, from its style, from individual statements it makes, from the modes of thought it employs, and a hundred other tokens, as to age, authorship, and the like, always with a like reserve as to possible forgeries, as in the previous case. And these signs may be absolute, and conclusive of the questions under discussion, or they may be

merely probable indications, yielding a stronger or a fainter presumption in all conceivable degrees.

Processes like these, then, are in constant application in the field of general literature. One example you will find described very well by Lord Macaulay, in his paper on Sir William Temple, in his collected Essays. It is the well-known case of the Letters of Phalaris, tyrant of Agrigentum. These Letters, having been slightingly spoken of by Richard Bentley, were defended, as to their genuineness, by a company of Oxford wits and scholars. Thereupon Bentley wrote his Dissertation. In it he conclusively proved that the Letters were spurious, by evidence which Macaulay describes. But to form an impression of the painstaking and thorough way in which the evidence is worked out, you must read Bentley's book itself.

Again, Augustine's Letters, confusedly thrown together in the old editions, were rearranged by their Benedictine editors, precisely on the principles applicable to the imaginary correspondence of which I spoke a little ago. To the permanent comfort and instruction of readers, two hundred and thirty-one letters are placed in order, exactly or approximately; thirty-nine follow, which no ingenuity nor learning can fix a date for; and in an appendix are printed a

score or thereabouts, which, though ascribed to Augustine, are proved by various indications not to be really his. For another example, there is an old epistle which bears the name of Barnabas, and which was early ascribed to the companion of the Apostle Paul. It may be held as proved on critical grounds, on the one hand, that it was not written by him; and, on the other, that, whoever wrote it, it must have been composed very early, in the beginning of the second century, if not in the end of the first.

Some of the nicest questions of criticism occur in the case of what I may call patched writings, *i.e.*, where earlier writings have been made the victims of later interpolations; or where compositions of various ages have somehow been run together into one work, and come down to us in that form. The history is easily made out, when you happen to have manuscripts representing each successive stage of the various component parts, as well as manuscripts of the amalgam ultimately formed out of them. When you have only the latter, you may be able to prove that you have before you work of different hands and different ages; but to make an exact and trustworthy separation is far harder. A case of this kind is presented by the monastic chronicles which grew up in the various great monasteries of England. In the preface to Sir Thomas Hardy's

"Chronicles and Memorials" the process is described by which the history was built, "until the tesselated fabric, piled up with continual additions, loses all trace of its original design, and it becomes impossible to assign to each author his respective share in the work." And the editor remarks that "the same critical skill which has produced so entire a revolution in the treatment of ancient history has not been applied to mediæval." Hence, he tells us, many important points have yet to be decided. In these monastic histories the process, though confusing to us, was perfectly honest; there was no intention to deceive. The deliberate deceptions were more in the monastic charters. But in our early Scottish histories there came in at one period a set of perversions, the motive of which was to build up a stronger case against those whom we used to describe as our "auld enemies of England." The effect was extremely confusing, because, after doubts began to be entertained, there was reason to believe that genuine traditions and deliberate misrepresentations were both present. But where did the truth end, and where did the lies begin? The disentangling of the whole story may be regarded as fairly well accomplished, and it is a good recent specimen of a critical problem gradually solved.

Now the Bible comes within the sphere of criticism; because the Bible, however peculiar its claims, and however remarkable its authority, is a part of the world's literature. This is an aspect of that divine condescension which, as believers, we ascribe to the revealing God, that His revelation unfolds itself into thoughts of men, and embodies itself in books which men write; which books, composed at sundry times and in diverse forms, are submitted to the common conditions through which books pass. Unlike other books in the spirit which it breathes and in the place which it vindicates for itself, the Bible is like other books in bearing upon its surface everywhere, and in its structure throughout, the marks of its history. There are testimonies to its books—express and incidental—within itself or found outside of it. It has also upon it, so to say, the tool-marks of the processes by which it grew into form. These are the facts and features which it belongs to criticism to examine, and to appreciate. They may not be always legible; their meaning not always articulate and unambiguous. But it is the business of criticism to see how much they mean. And there are very special reasons why the office of criticism, in this regard, should be fully recognised by believers. One is, that we are accustomed to plead in behalf of the Bible

a variety of evidences. We may feel—happy for us if we do!—that the highest and most conclusive evidence is that which the divine message itself affords, when, in connection with the work of the Spirit of God in the heart, it makes us conscious of its peculiarity and its power. But we do not confine ourselves to an appeal to this. We lay stress, rather, on the various lines of evidence by which the sacred writings are shown to be the record of God's revelation. In particular, we recognise the fact that God in His revelations has commonly been pleased to draw near to man in connection with the practical experience of life; and we exert ourselves to show that a just view of history supplies us with the whole historical basis which a faith like ours requires or admits of. But when we say so, we challenge historical investigation in all its forms. We not merely challenge it, we profess to welcome it. We invite the world to turn its scrutiny on what we maintain to be the sacred history, and on the books which exhibit the historical testimonies. We ask criticism to search and try; as our Lord said, "Handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have." For while criticism, or what calls itself such, may work perversely and under the influence of bad motives, still criticism, in its idea, in its proper office, is just the throwing

of all possible light on any series of historical facts and questions; it is thorough examination, in the use of the methods which experience has suggested. True, questions will here arise, and processes of proving will take place, which the devout mind would feel it more comfortable to avoid—more comfortable, but not necessarily more profitable. And we must expect to find these questions and these processes urged, sometimes, for the express object of destroying the authority of the Bible. But we can successfully meet that, and we ought to wish to meet it, in no other way, than by insisting on fair play; no less than justice, and no more. What justice *is* in the case of this particular book, is no doubt often a great part of the question.

That, then, is one way in which we may represent to ourselves the right of criticism to be conversant about the history of the Bible, and the Bible's relation to general history. But I do not think it is the main one. For the object of criticism, as of every other branch of liberal culture, is more than merely the controversial use which may be made of the material it provides. The true object is the actual and positive gain to knowledge, which these materials constitute and imply. The aspects of Scripture, the phenomena of Scripture, which here come into view for examination, are real. We have

here something to be known. It may not be the most important line of investigation to which Scripture invites us; it may be, on many accounts, only subordinate and accessory. But certainly it is one line of investigation. It belongs in its way to the complete knowledge of the Scriptures. It has, at least, as good a right as any of the branches of secular science or secular history. And as we willingly borrow from these any contributions they can yield to the understanding of the Bible, or to its defence, so we may from this. Sometimes this study yields results that promote the full understanding and right use of Scripture teaching. Sometimes, again, the result for the interpretation of the Scriptures, or for edification, may seem to be little or none. But, in either case, it is part of our duty to knowledge, to investigate whatever can be investigated; and it is part of our duty to the Bible, to know all about every aspect of it that can be known.

It is true, indeed, that we are apt to entertain an impression about the Bible which, if it were correct, would lead us to disallow the considerations I have now been urging. We may have an impression that all the most material questions that criticism can discuss, are prejudged and settled, directly or indirectly, by the Bible itself; so that a believing man cannot pretend

to await the results of investigation which a higher authority has wholly superseded. I borrowed an illustration, when speaking of the processes of criticism in general, from the case of a family correspondence, which it might fall to any of you to study and to arrange. One transferring that illustration to the case before us might say, "Suppose you find the correspondence, when you first approach it, already arranged, and each piece carefully docqueted, dated, and furnished with all needful information. And suppose you recognise in this the work of a parent, who combined in a remarkable degree the needful knowledge and the desirable care and accuracy, and who had equal claims on your love and your confidence. What then? Would you not be only too glad that your work was done to your hand by one better qualified than yourself?" Now, in answer to this, I must first observe that though I specified the case of arranging letters, as one in which the main operations of criticism might conceivably be exemplified, I did not say that the office of criticism was mere arranging; nor did I suggest that arranging of letters was a sufficient parallel to the case of the Bible, so far as it comes within the scope of criticism. Yet I will not reject the comparison so far as it goes. For there are aspects in which an interest-

ing analogy holds good. The letters are not our friend's self, yet through the letters how nearly, how feelingly, may his very self touch our souls! Also the peculiar evidence with which the letters of a friend we love witness both of his character and of their own genuineness—the evidence of both growing on us together, far beyond what we can represent or put in words—is not unlike the self-evidencing power of the Scriptures.

> "So, word by word, and line by line,
> The dead man touched me from the past;
> And all at once, it seemed, at last,
> His living soul was flashed on mine."

I accept the illustration, therefore, so far; and I ask, Are you entitled to assume that the supposition, made a few sentences back, fairly represents the case? Has the parent so completely done all? How do you know that we have all that minute and precise information from that source? How do you know that men have not been providentially allowed to do something in the way of arranging and of docqueting? As a matter of fact, you may know for certain that they have been so allowed. Suppose the arrangement were ever so authoritative, how could you know that it left nothing for criticism to do? Perhaps this family correspondence was arranged so as to group letters round topics, round events, round subjects of family interest

and instruction, in short, so as to serve important purposes, more important than the objects of criticism. But if so, then something might be left to criticism in the way of inquiring how things may arrange themselves from its special point of view, and so as to exhibit and verify the actual growth and history of the correspondence.

Certainly the Bible does not profess to guarantee to the believer a theory of the history of all its parts. It does not profess to certify us how each came into being and was preserved. Even if it did, I have already said that the claim of criticism to inquire into the phenomena could not be refused. It could not, as long as we plead, and profess to vindicate by evidences, a historical belief. But, in truth, the Bible is very far indeed from furnishing to us, and binding on us, such theories about its own history. It abounds in indications of quite another kind. There are plenty of facts about it which are simply allowed to appear, and which may be examined by those who feel inclined, but which, because the knowledge of them has no direct bearing on the great ends for which the Bible was written, are not made matter of statement or commentary.

In the next lecture I mean to speak more at large of the characteristics of the Bible in so far as it either tolerates or encourages critical

investigations. In the mean time it may be well to give an instance. The object of it is to place before you a simple example of the way in which these investigations are set agoing. I purposely select for this purpose not only a very simple case, but one in which no important results for history, and next to none at all for the understanding of the sense of the Book, arise from the investigation.

Take the Book of Proverbs. Above it stands, in our Bible, the title, "The Proverbs." Substantially the same is in the Hebrew Bible.[1] In the Greek translation it is, "The Proverbs of Solomon." These external titles, one learns, are often later in origin than is the book which they denote, and they often represent traditions not absolutely to be relied upon. But in this case the external title does not profess to tell much. On the other hand, the book itself opens with an account of its own authorship and object: "The Proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel," and so on. This fixes the author, and it indicates the object of the contents of the book, viz., to express and communicate, in fitting form, a certain kind of wisdom. At once we remember that Solomon was graced of God (1 Kings iv. 32) with "wis-

[1] But so as to indicate that it is simply the first word of the text of the book employed as a name for it.

dom and understanding exceeding much;" and it was wisdom uttered exactly in the form which this book selects and exemplifies, for "he spake three thousand proverbs," besides songs a thousand and five. Everything corresponds, and there seems no need of further question. We may go on to read the book as the record of the wisdom given to Solomon; only, perhaps, noting that this must be no more than a selection, made by himself, or by some later authority, from the stores of his wisdom, since we have here much fewer than three thousand proverbs.

But as we read, arriving at the tenth chapter, we find a fresh title prefixed to what is to follow; and it is, "The Proverbs of Solomon." Naturally we ask, Have we not been reading the proverbs of Solomon all through these nine remarkable chapters? Are we only now arriving at the proverbs of Solomon? Looking at the tenth and following chapters, we immediately become aware that now, and not till now, we come into contact with a series of *proverbs* properly so-called, select sententious maxims, meet to be fitted to the events and experiences of life, each of them independent of the others, and all held together merely by their common character as instances of proverbial wisdom. In contrast with this we

now remark that the contents of the first nine chapters were not strictly "proverbs," whether of Solomon or of any one else. Those chapters contain a series of earnest, affectionate, and singularly impressive commendations of wisdom, applied and illustrated in connection with various emergences and temptations, but gushing out in the free flow of eloquent address and admonition, not cut and compressed into the pithy brevity of proverb. Comparing the two parts—what precedes chap. x. 1 and what follows—one sees that the first is a hortatory preface or introduction to the second. It is intended to illustrate the main issues to which all this store of wisdom is subservient, and to awaken the heart and conscience to a livelier interest in the ends which true wisdom, duly minded, aims at and attains.

Now we understand that from chap. i. 1, or else, at any rate, from chap. i. 7, in one continuous context, an introduction has been in hand. Onwards to the end of chap. ix. it is all of a piece. It is, as far as we can see, the writing of him who wrote the introductory sentence, "The Proverbs," &c. This writer may be a later collector of these proverbs, or it may be Solomon himself, whose proverbs proper, according to the announcement in chap. x. 1, follow in the tenth and succeeding chap-

ters. In the latter case, Solomon was master of two styles, each adapted in its own peculiar way to the service of wisdom,—an idea which there need be no difficulty in admitting. But it seems not likely that, if he wrote the introduction, the fresh title at chap. x. 1 would be interposed as it is.

The next notable symptom in the book occurs at chap. xxv. 1: "These are also proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied out." Here several things are at once suggested. The book as it now stands is not older than the reign of Hezekiah. Presumably in that reign the selection which terminates chap. xxiv. 34 already existed, as far as appears, in its present form. But, besides, there were extant sources from which a further selection of Solomon's proverbs could be made; and from chap. xxv. 1 we have the selection which the men of Hezekiah "copied out," or transferred to the existing book. It is possible, no doubt, to assume that the men of Hezekiah "copied out" the previous part as well as that expressly assigned to them. But the other view is much more natural. This, then, carries us on to the end of chap. xxix. But at this point, chap. xxx. 1, we meet with a new title, which announces a new author: "The words of Agur the son of Jakeh, even the

prophecy." Still another title, announcing a new source, meets us in chap. xxxi. 1: "The words of King Lemuel, the prophecy that his mother taught him." And here we may be inclined to think that the separable elements have been all enumerated. But that is far from certain. At chap. xxxi. 10 a new subject opens, and it is not treated in proverbs, but in continuous poetical flow, and in a peculiar technical form. For, in the Hebrew, chap. xxxi. 10-31 is an alphabetical acrostic, the successive verses beginning with the letters of the alphabet in order. This, therefore, singles itself out as a distinct literary performance; and it may, or may not, be a part of the "words of King Lemuel."

When we have observed all this, we may be led once again to go through the book, to see whether there are in it any further signs of the collection together of separable parts. And there are such signs. The last twelve verses of chap. xxiv. have prefixed what seems a special title, "These things also belong to the wise." The most natural sense seems to be, "The following also are (composed or uttered) by the wise men." And, once more, a little further back, chap. xxii. 17, a separate section is marked by a change in the style, which reminds one somewhat of the earlier chapters of

the book, and which is carried on, on the whole, to chap. xxiv. 22. This section is not so strictly proverbial as the preceding chapters, and has more of the character of continuous discourse. At the same time it is in perfect sympathy with the proverbial wisdom, and embodies many a proverbial saying.

An examination of the book, then, shows us two collections of proverbs of Solomon, one beginning at chap. x. the other at chap. xxv. Preceding all is a long descriptive title in six verses (chap. i. 1–6); and an introduction, distinct in style from the more proverbial parts, of which one does not know whether it was written by Solomon, or, perhaps, by some other writer, the same, it may be, who furnished the title. The indications are in favour of the second alternative. At the end of the first collection of proverbs one short section seems to mark itself off as of separate authorship (chap. xxiv. 23), and another portion (chaps. xxii. 17–xxiv. 22) is intrinsically different from the rest; a fact, however, which does not necessarily imply distinct authorship. Then, again, after the later collection of proverbs of Solomon, come two appendices ascribed to distinct authors; and a third (chap. xxxi. 10), which is also strikingly beautiful and impressive, is a separate composition, whatever its authorship may have been. Notwithstanding,

the whole contents of the book have a common character and aim. The same general conception of wisdom, its nature, necessity, and benefits, pervades the whole.

Such are the apparent component parts of the book; and from this point of view critics have proceeded to study closely the words, the style, the cast of teaching of each portion, in order, if it may be, to gain some light as to the relative age and order of the several parts. But with these efforts and their results, whether more or less conjectural, I do not trouble you. What I have reported is enough for a specimen. And now it may be asked, Supposing all this to be so, what result comes of it for the ordinary student of the Bible? what help does it yield him towards making a profitable use of the Book? I think the answer must be, As nearly as possible none at all. It neither helps nor hinders, and leaves him very much where it found him. Nor even for the professional student and expounder, I may add, is the case widely different. The survey furnishes him with some distinct impressions as to the way in which, in certain circumstances, an inspired Hebrew book might have grown into its final form; and it contributes to the formation of a view as to the development of an important element of intellectual and moral life among the Hebrews,

and the forms in which that element gradually unfolded; in which connection it is, chiefly, that the effort to assign the age of the different parts is felt to be practical and useful. Impressions on these subjects, as far as they are sound and well grounded, help to an increased insight into the Bible generally, and an increased ability to deal with the problems it presents. But for the purpose of expounding the meanings and lessons of any of the proverbs here set forth, the aid arising from these studies of the structure of the book is slight and scanty. What then? Those studies constitute, for all that, a legitimate inquiry, which belongs, in its own place and way, to the enterprise of trying to know about the Scriptures as much as we can. Besides, they have a negative use. It is useful to make sure of what can be known and what cannot be known on this side, because the knowledge excludes fancies. Fancies—pious it may be, but still fancies—are apt to come floating in to all unoccupied ground, and thus unsettle and bewilder the mind. Thorough discussion of phenomena, even when it does not yield much positive result, is useful for laying ghosts.

II.

HISTORY AS THE FIELD IN WHICH THE BIBLE AND CRITICISM MEET.

II.

IF the statement implied in the title of this Lecture is correct, then we need not be surprised that the class of questions which I have to consider is creating discussion, at present, in a manner and degree probably unexampled.

For the present is emphatically an age of historical investigation. It is distinguished by diligence in the working out of historical facts and their connections. It is distinguished, also, by a very strong tendency to give to all departments of mental labour, and to all kinds of investigation, either an historical form or an historical application. Let me illustrate this more particularly. In the first place, there prevails a very strong sense of the interest attaching to every branch of human history. Every kingdom, every race, every period, every department of human effort and experience, has its story worked out, and written, and read. In the next place, in the cultivated mind there

is a livelier sense, than heretofore, of the importance of full examination of the sources, *i.e.*, of all the recorded materials from which history may be drawn. Enormous labour is expended in minute examination of these materials, so that no item may be omitted which can increase, or correct, our knowledge of the past. The story must be full and exact, or at least reproduced from a full and exact attention to every item of information that has a claim to be considered. Thirdly, although temptations to indulge a bias in reading or writing history never cease to operate, it is still probably true that a desire to know the "thing as it was" now exists more vividly, and operates more powerfully than heretofore, in the general mind. The mere desire to hear a story that will tell well on one side or other, if not thoroughly renounced, is at least more consciously and decidedly condemned. The obligation to look at history in the spirit of jurymen, is more distinctly present to the public mind, though it might be too much to say that it governs it. Fourthly, there is therefore a fear or jealousy of history being written to suit theory. It is quite true, for all that, that theory is infused into history as plentifully, perhaps, as at any former time. But, at all events, it must be theory not quite *a priori*, but seeming to rise out

of the history as its very burden and spirit and life. Therefore a more careful and explicit dealing with facts and their relations, is demanded on the one hand, and professed or attempted on the other. Fifthly, the perception of one truth has grown wonderfully, viz., that past events have left their traces in other forms besides documents and records; languages, manners, institutions, traditions, superstitions, all things that are perpetuated from age to age, have proved capable of being cross-questioned, and of yielding their tribute to the historian; even in cases where written records have perished, or where they never existed. And, sixthly, all this is animated by a genuine feeling of the unity of history; that every part of it is organically connected with the great whole. All researches in the historical field seem to draw interest and dignity from being portions of one great roll, which unfolds the experimental development of man, in the earth which God has given him to inhabit.

Hence, not only have new force and variety accrued to historical investigations, but the tendency has grown to give, as much as may be, an historical form or application to all human investigations. That is to say, men love to seek in history the verification of principles. In connection with every investigation, every

department of research, they are disposed to look to the history of the successive steps and movements by which that department has advanced, as affording the surest guidance, or at least the most fruitful suggestions, with reference to principles.

I have said so much because I wish to direct your attention to the peculiar relation in which the Bible stands to history. If we understand that, we shall then also perceive the relation in which it must stand to criticism, which is a historical discipline, working always in the historical field, and working now with great intensity.

Just think for a moment what the Bible might have been, and what it is. A revelation, we are apt to think, must be a declaration of truths and duties; that, at least, must be its main character. We usually conceive the truths to be most adequately expressed when they are summed up in clear intellectual forms, and the duties when they are condensed into comprehensive moral principles; in short, idealised. We cannot imagine a worthy revelation that does not move in the region of ideas, that does not possess our minds with great eternal thoughts, in which we apprehend the permanent glory of the divine nature and will. Is it, then, in this line that the Bible approaches us? No; revelation *has*

great thoughts, with which it proposes to take possession of us; but yet God, in revealing, is seen approaching man, not on the plane of ideas, but, as one has said, on the plane of fact. Facts, events, transactions, — these form the foundations, these supply the framework, these embody the forms of relation between God and men. Out of these the doctrines are seen rising and springing, shedding light back indeed on the practical situation, but themselves understood by a reference to it. And all along, the *doings* of the Lord, and His dealings with men, form the practical root out of which all grows. So it is in Genesis, and so it is right onwards. Thus, then, you have an immense series of events reported in the Bible, not in a casual way, but so as to stand in the most intimate relation to all its other contents. And, in addition to the history it reports, there is a history which itself exhibits or implies. For each of its books is a fact, the origin of each an event. About each of them one asks, What historical place and character does it claim? what historical place and character does it deserve to have accorded to it?

Thus we find the Bible spreading itself, so to say, over the whole length of human history, from the beginning down to the date of its latest book. Its own literary history — the

period of its composition—stretches over some fifteen hundred years. No sacred book of any other religion assumes responsibilities with reference to history in a degree at all approaching to this one; for if some, the Vedas for example, have arisen and taken shape by degrees during long periods, they still do not move in the plane of human history, but rather take flight out of it; whereas the Bible is historical in its substance as well as in its form, setting forth the history of Revelation and Redemption. In doing this it takes up into itself large parts of the history of the world. It includes persons and events which enter also into the field of profane or ordinary history. We reach these, on the one hand, through the references of holy men of old, speaking through the Spirit; we reach them, on the other, through the ordinary channels of information about past events. Pontius Pilate, for example, comes before us in the gospels in circumstances of melancholy interest. He comes before us, also, in the pages of Tacitus, just like any other unscrupulous provincial governor in the reign of Tiberius.

How plainly, then, does this body of writings claim the services of historical investigation! That is needed, in the first place, for the purpose of ascertaining the identity of those writings, and the fact of their safe preservation.

Historical investigation may not be the only means by which this important object is permanently effected. But certainly it will be one, and a leading one, unless we are to discard historical evidence altogether. The original divine communications, the utterances of prophetic men, arose out of historical situations, in connection with which their meaning and force are most truly understood. So, also, the books of Scripture, whatever divine care presided over their conception and execution, took shape under the influences of a given age and situation, to which the writer belonged; and they emerged into view, were recognised, and were handed down, for the most part, by methods that were ordinary rather than exceptional. All this, naturally, claims investigation. Hence, to take an obvious example, the original collecting and settling of our New Testament canon must have included processes of historical investigation. Those processes had their own place, whatever elements of authority, or intuitions of faith, may have combined to establish the general consent of Christians. Then, secondly, critical research may be expected to throw light on ten thousand points, all along the course of a revelation so historical; which, indeed, it has done, in a degree quite impossible to represent in this rapid

sketch. But, in the third place, there is an independent testimony which the Scriptures await from historical investigation in its own sphere. That is to say, we, with our Christian beliefs and impressions regarding the Bible, look to historical investigation for any testimony it is able to give, either about the books, or about their contents. And what we naturally expect from this quarter is help. As believers, we are already prepared to say, that history on the great scale, taken in the rough, yields us the support we need on that side; we have got, in a general way, the historical setting which a revelation like ours requires. We are not disposed to think that the manifold web of evidence is likely to fail in that element of it. But we wish to make sure of this in more detail. We expect, then, that criticism, which is just historical investigation more minutely and thoroughly carried out, will bring to us further corroborations of our faith, will add its independent testimonies to the truth of that history, which is the history of Redemption.

We may not expect that criticism, merely on its own principles, or working with the aspects of Scripture that most attract its attention, shall make a great contribution of light or evidence to the divine glory of the Gospel. For criticism naturally applies itself to the human

side, the outside, the under side, as we may say, of Scripture. Nor is it reasonable to expect that criticism shall furnish us with a complete historical demonstration of the historical conditions under which the Scriptures were written. We may wish it could; but we cannot expect it. For many a passage of history has vanished now, and never can be restored; and even if the books themselves bear the marks of their origin and history, these marks are often to us impenetrable and illegible. But criticism can bring its own peculiar light to bear, with greater clearness or less, on a series of points along the line of Revelation and its Record. In that light we naturally expect to find confirmed the honesty of Bible speakers, and the accuracy of Bible statements, and the claims of Bible books to be what they profess to be. We expect the same kind of corroboration, on these points, as we see arising at a criminal trial, when a number of little circumstances, unimportant in themselves, give a significant setting, and so a determinate meaning, to the main facts and testimonies.

Accordingly, what we call the external evidence, and a large part of the internal, are constructed in this way. Lardner's "Credibility" is much occupied in showing the marks which the existence of Bible books, and the belief of Bible facts, have left in the literature of the

world, up as near as possible to apostolic times, and thence downwards. And Paley's "Horæ Paulinæ" is a set of critical exercises, intended to show that between the Acts and Paul's epistles, or between those epistles as compared with one another, coincidences exist, which are undesigned and unconscious; whence arises a probability, varying in value in each instance, but rising very high when you put all the instances together, that you have here, not the invention of some deceiver's fancy, but an actual situation, in which the men were living, speaking, writing, as the records imply.

And here it is worth observing, that criticism often affords a corroboration of Scripture in some degree, even when it seems to fall disappointingly short of what on other grounds we might desire. It has been the general belief of Christians that we ought to ascribe to the statements of the Bible trustworthiness even in minor details. But where criticism has no testimony to offer in favour of that conviction, nay, even when it is disposed to question it, it may still have a measure of corroboration to offer, which we ought to feel to be thoroughly on our side as far as it goes. For example, we have an account of a period in the history of the Jews contained in the Books of Kings and

Chronicles. As in some other instances, there is a curious dependence, and a curious independence, in the two accounts. Now criticism will not undertake on human grounds to vindicate the minute accuracy of either record. And many critics have been ready to impute a certain degree of bias to one author or both, leading, as they think, to a colouring of the narrative that requires to be allowed for. But unquestionably the verdict of criticism is that, quite apart from faith in Revelation, a student should believe that here we have history, not fiction. Violent men may give another representation of it, but considerate men of all schools will admit it. And those who think that there are real discrepancies in the two narratives, and distinct signs of bias and credulity in each, can maintain that, just on that account, there comes to light, when the whole case is searched out, a stronger complex evidence in favour of the main facts. Now we need not cease to value this independent tribute to the reality of the historical framework in connection with which Revelation went on, even though we may think we have reason to treat these books with more respect, and to understand their peculiarities in a somewhat different way.

Well: but while criticism may be expected so to increase our knowledge as also to confirm

our faith, that is not always the case. Ever since critical processes began to be searchingly applied to the Scriptures two hundred years ago, not to go back to earlier times, the church has been vexed with controversy all along the immense line of historical positions which the Scriptures cover or disclose. And here let us distinguish. Those who wholly distrust the peculiar claims of the Bible are sure to find materials for assault in this field; and therefore they have plentifully laboured in it. Where the Scripture writings could be confronted with either histories, or documents, or traditions, contradictions have been suggested; and, whether external evidence could be procured or not, reasons have been pleaded from the books of Scripture themselves to show that they are not what they claim to be. So a long series of batteries, some less formidable and some more, have been erected, bearing on the date, authorship, unity of books of Scripture, and the truth of the statements which they contain.

For example, it has been maintained, on critical grounds, that the book of the Acts of the Apostles was visibly written with a motive, or for a purpose, *i.e.*, as a party version of a story, which required to be coloured for party purposes. Further, that this purpose, or motive, is only intelligible, if the book is of later date

and other authorship than has commonly been understood. Further, that in various particulars it is in conflict with the representations of matters of fact in the epistles of Paul. It has been maintained that the gospels are irreconcilable with one another, and in particular the three first with the last, and that the divergences, along with other symptoms, require us to assign them to dates somewhere in the second century. It has been maintained that various books which in our Bible appear as unities, are, in fact, amalgamations of pieces of diverse date and authorship; and this has been so maintained, as strongly to suggest the idea of chance or blundering, one or both, as presiding over the history and the collocation of the fragments. It has been maintained that books, said to be written by certain holy men, were not written by them nor in their days, but by others, and generally for the purpose of supporting a false version of history. And various parts of the Old Testament and the New have been alleged to present the well-known characteristics of legend, and to be understood properly, only when they are referred to the processes of the popular mind, by which, in all ages, legends grow. Then a perennial subject of discussion has been the interpretation of the Old Testament. It is part of our faith

that the Old Testament prepared for and prophesied of the New. Is that true? If so, how is it true, and in what sense? On this question positions have been maintained, disturbing in a greater degree or a less. This indeed is a more purely exegetical question. But much the same motives have prevailed here on both sides. In all these instances the conclusions have been based professedly on an exact appreciation of statements and characteristics of the books of the Bible brought under consideration, compared with such external evidences as might be accessible.

It would be a mistake to think that all the positions maintained under these heads, have been, in themselves, equally objectionable. As to their intrinsic merits or demerits, they have varied exceedingly. But the character attaching to them, as now referred to, is this,—that they have been made available for supporting a general scheme or mode of view, which professes to account for the existence of the Bible, without conceding its divine origin, or its divine authority. In this respect the drift of a great many of these views is plain, and will be resisted as long as men believe in revealed religion. Equally plain has been the drift of many who maintained them, who were plainly unbelievers, men, for instance, who denied the possibility of

the supernatural, and made that denial part of the basis of their argument. Others, again, to whom it would be unfair to impute that character, have at least given evidence of a strong tendency to push critical speculation on slender grounds to great lengths, without much apparent concern as to what the consequences might be. Hence, both on account of what they saw in the views, and what they saw in the men, the attitude of divines all along the line has frequently been simply militant and defensive. Criticism has very often been treated as a foe, who must be allowed no more ground than we are absolutely compelled to assign to him.

Yet remember this: although enough of scepticism and recklessness has been concerned in this business, you are not to suppose that commonly those who have given us trouble had no ground at all to go upon. Sometimes, indeed, one can find little at the bottom of the disturbance but sheer wilful fancies; but usually it is not wholly so. Earnest discussions in this field have not usually left things exactly where they found them. Sometimes facts have been brought forward, and aspects of things, which previously men had been content to overlook, or had failed to appreciate; of these, henceforth, they were obliged to take account;

and thus, truth gained. Critical conclusions, even when unreasonable or infidel in their character, have been often based on facts which were not, indeed, to be recognised in the form proposed, but which yet deserved to be recognised in some form. If a man is learned and investigative, the positions he selects will commonly be based on something plausible, something that will bear argument. Therefore even if he be sceptical, even if he be not judicious, even if he be not perfectly truthful, there will be something to learn from him. And, still more certainly, when any critical conclusion becomes extensively accepted among men of good powers and opportunities, you may take it for granted that there is something at the bottom of it which deserves study. After deducting what is to be set down for mere perverse prejudices, if such appear to be present, and also what is to be set down for the fashion of the day, which sometimes influences critics as much as it does ladies, there commonly remains something to have justice done to it in the interests of truth. You may not be qualified to do that justice to it. But if you will have patience, you will find it done at last by some one. The Tübingen school built an enormous fabric of fanciful rationalism upon a theory they had of decisive opposition between the Apostle Paul and the other apostles. It

was monstrously learned and ingenious, if a man could only have believed it. It has for some time been vanishing away. But it has, no doubt, left behind a more lively and just appreciation, than existed before, of the opposition between Judaising and non-Judaising Christians, and the effects of that on the earliest history of the church. And you will find the results made use of, for example, in Dr. Lightfoot's excellent commentaries, and other recent booksof the same class.

Now I have thought it necessary to put the case in this way; for while, on the one hand, we have had the comfort of the corroborations which historical criticism has yielded to faith, and of the various lights it has shed on Bible facts and inspired thought, on the other hand, in the discussions which have threatened to unsettle the confidence of Christians there has manifestly been a great deal of unbelief that is simply blind to the credentials of the Gospel, and a great deal also of recklessness and folly. These things are true, and it would be a useless affectation of impartiality to pretend to be blind to them. No scruple should be felt in saying so. Plenty of men are at work in this field, proceeding on principles so perverse, that what they put forth ought to be regarded with jealousy, and will probably prove deserving of

resistance. But if so, that must be made to appear upon the merits, when the matter is discussed. For now I ask this question, When, on critical grounds, an opinion is advanced which causes discomfort and anxiety, by its tendency to unsettle some of the views which we, as believers, have been wont to cherish, is the door simply to be shut against it in the name of faith? Are we to say that critical difficulties — positions which it is difficult to reconcile with the testimony of the Scripture, or with our faith about the Scripture—are simply to be sent about their business as necessarily due to some mistaken or perverse use of critical methods? I say, No. I think, indeed, that many of us have no qualifications for deciding such questions on their merits, and, until the matter is thoroughly cleared up, have the best reason for refusing to be shaken in mind. When it is cleared up we may even hope to be confirmed in mind. But critical conclusions such as I have described may have good right, first, certainly to be heard, and, second, possibly to be accepted. I suppose some admission like this, in some form, will be made almost universally. But, then, I wish to fix attention on the question why we make it. How is this? If the Scriptures be from God, how should criticism—fairly ap-

plied criticism, a process which aims at doing right to facts—how should it ever fail to confirm the impressions which Scripture makes upon our minds? How should it ever breed difficulties? I answer, there is nothing strange about it. It could not, and it cannot, be otherwise. The tendency to some measure of misunderstanding or of collision lies in the very nature of the case. Human minds, working along the various lines of thought and search, cannot but have these experiences. And the sooner that is recognised the better for all parties.

The ground of this assertion is not far to seek. First, let me show you how the Bible makes room for it. I spoke a little ago of the peculiar and extensive relations of the Bible to history. Now notice the method of the Bible in dealing with history.

For, while this Book, itself framed on history, touches at so many points the history of the world, while it takes up into itself persons and events of which general or ordinary history knows and can report something, the Bible does this only for its own great end. It takes concern with such things no farther than that object requires. We, from the point of view of faith, of which I spoke, recognise here a manner and style becoming the Spirit of God.

Others may account for it in another manner. Either way, the fact remains. In its pages men come before us as they stand related, for a lifetime perhaps, or for a moment perhaps, to the great current of the history of Redemption. The story of them is thrown into any form that makes sincere history for the object in view; not perhaps into forms that could be counted sincere or exact history for some totally different object. How these persons and events stood related to other currents of history, with which perhaps they had a good deal more to do than with the Bible one, is not at all regarded. Take Pontius Pilate, again, as an instance. The great sphere of his life and action was the politics of the Roman Empire. An ordinary Latin historian, dealing with the Roman Empire, if he dealt with it in much detail, might take up Pilate and exhibit him in connection with the arrangements, the court intrigues, the aims and fortunes of the Empire. Now those did, in point of fact, determine the main outlines of the earthly history of Pilate, and so it is to such a historian that we would go, if we could, for the view of Pilate and his experiences which constitutes ordinary biography. The Bible refers to him only as he stood connected with the history of our Lord, and takes no concern about any further ques-

tions that may be raised about him, even though those should be suggested by what is stated in the Bible itself.

The Bible, in short, has occasion to touch upon a great number of matters that are mere stepping-stones to its main object, and merely incidental to its main teachings. These matters may be very essential parts, central and leading parts of other studies. They may be very curious and interesting considered as matter of scientific or historical investigation. Hence they may very naturally give occasion for all sorts of questions; and the materials for answering them, to be found in the records of human knowledge, may be more plentiful in one case, less plentiful in another. The Bible does not interfere in the matter. It refers to these things in the one connection in which they had to do with its own objects: as to all other aspects and connections it leaves them alone. Some maintain that about such things the Bible is so written as not to avoid minor inaccuracies. The writers were not preserved from these. I do not say so; I shall have something to say on that view of the case before I have done; but I do certainly say that the Bible *does not undertake to guarantee us against false impressions about them.* The one thing the Bible has occasion to say about a man, however true, may give a very different

impression about him, and even about that event in his life, from that which we should have had if we had before us twenty other facts that might have been told. But the Bible did not undertake to draw his character, but only to say so much about him as might be needful towards explaining more important things. The one notice the Bible gives of a particular event, may give us an impression of the way in which the actors were related to one another, very different from that we should have had if we had before us a full political history of it. But the Bible does not undertake to explain precisely how the thing fell out, but only makes use of the fact that it did, in the way that suits its own purpose. So, again, the one or two things which the Bible mentions about a man or an event may not be easily pieced together with what, let us say, Tacitus relates, and possibly quite truly, about the same man or the same fact. Tacitus related that which was important for the purposes of ordinary history, interesting for a spectator of life and politics. What the Bible notices, from a distinctly different interest, might possibly require a long and curious story of connections and coincidences in order to let us see how it pieces together with what Tacitus reports. But, then, the Bible gives us no part of such a story,

because it did not undertake to show us how it could keep step with Tacitus, even when Tacitus is most trustworthy. In all such cases we are apt to form impressions from what the Bible tells us of a man or thing, as if it had been telling us the main or leading feature of one or other. But such impressions are misleading; we have no right to form them, and the Bible does not undertake to correct them. What the Bible reports of man or thing is the connection which either had with the history in which it is interested, as the history of Redemption. If difficulty arises, in adjusting that to what we learn, from other sources, the Bible will leave us to settle the question exactly as we please, speedily or leisurely, or not at all. It takes not the least concern in the matter; at least, it gives no indication of a purpose to supply materials to help us on such points.

Taking this along with us, we may easily see that the investigations of historical criticism, whatever corroborations they bring to Christianity, are certain also to bring difficulties to Christians. Events referred to in the Bible will appear to be excluded, or encumbered with oppressive improbabilities, in the light of evidence drawn from sources of a purely natural or secular kind, or even drawn from minute

comparison and cross-questioning of different parts of the Bible itself; and books of the Bible, which make their appearance there in the simple straightforward way with which we are all familiar, will be found, when scrutinised on their human side, to bear marks not easily reconciled with what is believed about these books in the church of God. Nor can these arguments be shut out, whatever may prove to be the worth of them. For in both cases the natural order is present as well as the supernatural, and the evidence proper to it deserves to be worked out according to its own ascertained laws. I say this cannot but happen. It always does happen when we are trying to combine evidence that comes from very different quarters, and at the same time are left without the information, full, circumstantial, and detailed, which is necessary for solving puzzles and clearing away perplexities. Hence these collisions are apt to happen in two kinds of cases chiefly. First, when we have to deal with things that are minute, small details, occupying no considerable place in the history of the world; second, when historical research breaks into ground where materials are scanty, where comparison of full and specific testimonies is excluded, and when facts and dates are only seen faintly through a haze of antiquity.

But what are we to say about the cases when they arise? Are we to say, as some have said before us, that what is true in theology might be false in philosophy, and therefore also in science? Or are we to say that such things must all remain in the category of unexplained difficulties? Or are we to hold that faith must simply capitulate, and accept whatever criticism may appoint for it? Or are we, on the other hand, to hold that criticism, after it has said its say, shall be bidden hold its peace and defer to the dictates of faith? Now, really, the answer to this greatly depends on particular cases being separately considered according to the evidence applicable to each. In the next Lecture I hope to turn your attention to the considerations that arise when we look at the kind of evidence applicable to these questions. For the present I can only answer these questions generally.

To illustrate what alone, I think, can be the general answer, let me here make a digression, and take an illustration from a parallel case, more fully parallel than perhaps we may at first imagine. Has it ever occurred to you that the modern scientific difficulties and objections generally make themselves felt, just like those we are speaking of, in the historical field? Some time ago people were exercised about geology.

But it was not geology pure that occasioned the trouble; it was geology passing into history, or professing to supply materials for historical inferences, and to construct a history from its own point of view. It is the same with some difficulties which are raised at the point where geology passes into antiquarianism, where relics of the early history of man offer themselves to be discussed. It is so also with the question of the origin of species, and, in particular, of the human species. Natural history and physiology, hand in hand with geology, pass into history. They are alleged to yield indications about the beginnings of our race, and so they come into collision with the Scripture teaching as we have received it.

Now I am not inquiring here how far such and such scientific speculations may or may not be ultimately judged scientifically trustworthy, nor how far any of them are, or are not, essentially infidel, as opposed to great Christian beliefs. But this I do say in general, that such difficulties cannot but arise. Owing to the methods in which, and the conditions under which, the human mind makes progress, they are inevitable. It is wrong to think either that they can always be avoided, or that it is right to make every sacrifice in order to avoid them.

It was not, for example, from any perverse

or unbelieving drift on the part of the geologist that trouble arose. There might be geologists, of course, who, on independent grounds, were disposed to think the Bible untrustworthy, and who, therefore, were disposed to look out for fresh demonstrations of its untrustworthiness in the field of their own science. But the true root of the difficulty lay elsewhere. Any history which geology could exhibit, must be history from a totally different point of view, and with quite another perspective of materials, from anything exhibited in the Bible; and therefore a harmony between them on this ground could not at first be obvious, might, indeed, at first sight seem to be excluded. We can see now that the true way of dealing with the matter would have been to deprecate haste on both sides. The geologist would be wrong if, on the strength of his conclusions, he denounced the Bible account of creation as a mere deceptive legend; but he was right if he asserted that, on the evidence of his own science, he found proof of such and such successive states of the earth's surface, and such and such successions of creatures, requiring enormous periods of time, and not presenting him, as far as he could yet see, with conditions that suggested the Bible narrative. And the divine was wrong if he denounced the

geologist for frankly expounding the apparent testimony of facts, or required him to repress them in the interest even of the apparent sense of Scripture, or to compress them artificially into a Bible framework; but he was right if he maintained that the Scripture narrative had its own authority, and was entitled to be credited as that view of creation best fitted to form, in the minds of all generations, a just impression of it, in its connection with human faith and human destiny. Both were called upon to own that they might possibly have something to learn and something to revise. But each had a right to feel, that within the proper boundaries of their respective fields they were to refuse to silence the testimony which it was the peculiar duty of each to expound.

Such, one can see, is the theoretical attitude that ought to have been maintained by both parties. Unfortunately we cannot get the theoretical attitude maintained; we can only remember it, and hold it up to view now and again. It is difficult to get it maintained, first, for intellectual reasons. Nobody's logic is perfect; that of some people is preposterous. The geologist, instead of making a sound report of what his facts indicated, might be eager, speculative, fanciful, and might build boundless conclusions on narrow foundations; the divine,

instead of soundly estimating the point of view from which the Bible speaks, and the objects it has in view, might draw wide conclusions from the letter of the record, as if it were an inspired report upon geology. And then there are moral reasons. The geologist might exhibit the animus of an unbeliever, zealous to establish the conclusions of unbelief. I am far from saying that geologists generally did so; some of them were warm-hearted Christian men. The divine might exhibit the animus of a heresy-hunter, zealous to denounce what he did not understand. I am far from saying that divines generally did so; some of them were geologists. But too often, in such cases, both for intellectual reasons and for moral, eagerness prevails. And so the calm, self-restraining spirit, which compares results and does justice to other men's points of view, gives place to the jealous and hostile spirit, to the vigour of offence and defence, and the determined effort to sway public opinion to one side or to the other. Still, one can see, I repeat, that the attitude I have described is the attitude which the nature of the case should have dictated to devout and reasonable minds.

And the time when the call to this should have been seriously felt, was that time when it began to be seen that, in the minds of some com-

petent geologists, a tolerably clear view was taking shape of the manner in which the evidence of their own science should be read, and rendered.

Now, observe, I am not basing the theory of the case on the ground that the geologists in the main were right. As a matter of fact they were, and it was the divines who had most to learn in that case; although, happily, under the influence of some sagacious and enlightened men, they were not so slow to learn the necessary lesson as sometimes they have been. But I hold the duty of both parties would have been in substance the same, *even* though it had turned out, after a while, that owing to some set of facts, unexpectedly brought to light, the confidence of the geologists in their own conclusions had been dissipated again, and the old way of taking the narrative in Genesis had remained unimpeached after all.

Now so it is—I must say, *just so*—with criticism. I do not mean with criticism when it is on our side, or with criticism when its findings are immaterial either way, but with criticism when it draws attention to facts and arguments, which we do not yet know well how to reconcile with views, which we count both valuable and well established. I grant freely, when I say so, that this does not help us a great deal; for in

such a statement criticism is supposed to be reasonable criticism, soundly applying valid methods. And, what is reasonable criticism? And, on the other side, faith is supposed to be considerate and enlightened; but when is it such? Still, let us remember this, as the point to start from;—such criticism and such faith, if both be human, would, and must, find difficulties arising, and there is a right way of dealing with them. Grant that under the garb of criticism you may find sometimes an extravagant and petulant dogmatism which deserves to be rebuked; grant that you find sometimes, or often, alas, an insidious unbelief which is simply zealous to pervert the right ways of the Lord, and with which friendly and confiding fellowship cannot and ought not to be maintained. Grant, on the other side, that that which passes as belief, or orthodoxy, may be as extravagantly dogmatic in its way, or may be sinfully suspicious and denunciatory, or may be dishonest and unfair in its methods of getting rid of evidence. That may be, on one side or both, and then ideal positions and processes can hardly fail to give place to practical collisions. Still, the case is one in which there is sometimes good ground to say to each party, You may be largely right, and yet it does not follow that the other side is far wrong. Let it

be considered, whether there be not some substantial apparent ground of difficulty, that lays hold of the minds of thoughtful and competent men. If so, then the question how to deal with it remains for discussion. But meanwhile let it not be *assumed* on the one side that the faith is mere narrowness and blindness, let it not be assumed on the other that the criticism is mere scepticism or wantonness. What has occurred *may* be one of the necessary crises by which alone, under human conditions, the education of men (and we are always educating one another) can go on. For criticism, in her proper function, is striving to get her materials into historical line, according to her own methods and principles, just as faith strives to conceive and understand things from the point of view of faith. And both have their right. But as they reside in human minds neither is infallible.

It may seem, indeed, that there is a great difference, as regards the relation to the Bible and biblical faith, between criticism, on the one hand, and those other sciences from which I have drawn my illustration.

Those others, geology, antiquarianism, physiology, and so on, find their materials in the world around us. The facts on which they build, and with which they primarily deal, are

not in the Bible, but in earth, and air, and sea. It is after they have wrought out these, in regions where the Bible has nothing to say, and is in no respect in view, that, drawing out certain indications and applications, they find themselves, really or apparently, in conflict with something which the Bible does say. This, it may be said, is not wonderful. But criticism applies itself to the study of the very book itself, of the very books. It examines the sacred letter, it interprets, it scrutinises, it weighs every indication, every sign. The grammar and the lexicology, the dialect and the style, the logic and the rhetoric, the history, the geography, the chronology; it peers into all, and ponders over all. The Bible itself, the books of the Bible, are the professed object of study. "It is easy to admit," you say, "that a science which starts, as it were, from a thousand miles away, should not at once range its conclusions in a harmonious line with those of the Bible when at last they chance to come together. But here, in the case of criticism, when the object of study is the very Book itself, surely if this be the Book of God, and if the methods of study be soundly applied, the result will be to bring out the deeper, fuller, clearer harmonies which must be in it. If, on the contrary, it brings out results which one way or another

seem to set the Bible in contradiction with itself, or with general history, this must be ascribed either to the defective logic, or to the perverse and sceptical disposition of the critic, and the case deserves to be treated accordingly."

Or, to put it in another way, you may say, "In the case of those other sciences, whose main and proper field is outside the Bible, I do not object to be called upon to reckon patiently with their findings, when they happen to cross my path. But here, where criticism makes the Bible itself its subject, where the findings it utters are about the Bible itself,— about its statements, about its materials,—then it has come into the very domain of faith, and the matter becomes too serious for me to admit an independent right to speak. All the more it is so, when I know how apt the very contact with the Bible itself is, to waken up perverse and malignant activities in unchastened minds, and to set them on to subdue the Book which they will not allow to subdue them. Therefore, here I make my stand, and will make no compromise. Criticism shall speak what I have learned to consider to be the language of faith; or, if not, it shall meet from me, not with friendly conference, but with resolute debate, sword in hand for the defence of the sacred territory."

Now there is something in this sentiment

which, so far from being merely decried, ought to be cherished. Criticism, as I have said, works at the lower side of Scripture; but the vitalities of Christianity are connected with the upper side, with the point of view of faith, with the fire that kindles as a man takes God's word from God's hand, that he may have it for his meat and his drink, his light and his song. That believing enthusiasm, when it is genuine, is the especial work of God's Spirit. It needs for certain purposes the accompanying, or counter-activities, of various forms of knowledge, and of criticism among the rest. But it is entitled and bound ever to keep its own great place, and to stand for its own good right. Whatever comes on critical grounds, or any other grounds, subverting Christianity, that faith will repel; and indeed it may be very sure that the argument which professes to reach such a conclusion began with denying the possibility of Christianity, and started from the very point that was to be proved. But more than that, the Christian believer will refuse to allow his conception of the Bible to be transformed, or to let his use of it be paralysed and intercepted, by what he hears of opinions which he cannot receive without that effect following. Let a man stand by what he knows, especially what he knows in his inward experience. If

those opinions have any truth in them, that truth will take shape at last, so as to fall in with and promote his profit by the Scriptures. Therefore, never let us undervalue the instinct of the believing mind, which rises up against anything that threatens to rob it of its treasure.

But, then, it is a miserably weak experience for faith to be driven from one position after another, which it had declared to be matter of faith, but which, under the constraint of approved facts, it is at last constrained to abandon. It is a miserably weak experience; and it arises from our making the mistake of counting everything we have been led to think, in connection with the Bible, to have the same certainty. It arises from our being so sure that everything is matter of faith, which, in point of fact, we cherish as an impression received by our minds in converse with God's Word, or in the course of our thoughts about it. Whereas, in regard to some things, is not this the position we had a right to take, viz., to say that it *might* be matter of faith, and we thought it was, and would not be persuaded otherwise without evidence? It is not a good thing for faith, that the credit of it should have been committed to the authority of the Hebrew points, and to the absolute purity of the text, and to the old views of the first chapter of Genesis. It was quite right to

discuss these things. It was no shame to be wrong about them. But it was not wise, nor well done, to profess to be sure on points of that kind, or to take the tone about them which only the assurance of faith would have warranted. For the only question I deal with is, not whether criticism may validly call upon us to mend our Bible, but whether in some cases it may validly call upon us to mend our impression of the effect of statements of the Bible, or our impression of the inferences to be drawn from the position which it holds as the Word of God and rule of faith. With the highest views of the infallibility of the Bible, it still agrees that the believer is not infallible. Even when his impression of some aspect of the Bible, some point of Bible teaching, is right, it may not be so sure, so ascertained, as to be above being reconsidered. Even when it includes a great deal that is right, it may not be so accurately right as to admit of no amendments. Even when it is sincere, and grounded on an apparent natural construction of Biblical words, it has sometimes proved to include serious misunderstandings which needed to be removed. And therefore faith must not refuse to reckon, I do not say with everything that calls itself criticism, but with serious criticism, alleging substantial facts which require to be accounted for.

For consider, criticism deals with the indications of the origin, history, literary character of the sacred books—the tool-marks which they carry, and the cross lights falling on their history. Now remember, that, except as it falls in the way of its main objects, the Bible does not interest itself about these features of itself. It carries them as it were unconsciously. With all those multifarious marks of its history of fifteen hundred years upon it, the Bible rises into view, its eye fixed on its main object, and on the many subordinate objects which are related to that, and its voice busy with the utterances of its message about these—speaking of itself or of its authors as much, we may suppose, as is needful with reference to those objects, but without any apparent solicitude to furnish explanations. A great deal, at least about itself, the Bible apparently cares as little to determine as it does to clear up the historical or the scientific problems which arise for us in the study of its pages.

And, again, criticism deals with matters about which we have statements in the Bible, but generally minor matters. Now, is it true or not true, that, for want of perfectly attaining the point of view of the speaker, or of apprehending his drift, or understanding the kind of impression at which he aims, we may for a long time mis-

understand statements of Scripture (delivered in that manner which I have tried to describe), and may ascribe to them a precision and range of reference they were not intended to have? I have no difficulty in thinking that possible, and I see no reason to doubt that critical conclusions might be contrary to some cherished impressions of mine, and yet be right.

But, then, I am not going to believe that, in any particular case, without evidence. In the next Lecture I hope to say something of the kind of evidence we have here to deal with, and the way of dealing with it. And I hope to show you that there is good reason for caution as well as candour in dealing with what the critics propose. Meanwhile I conclude with saying that it is no part of my object, in these remarks, to produce upon your minds the impression that it is your duty or mine to open our mouths very wide, for the purpose of swallowing critical theories that happen to have been plausibly proposed, and to be floating about in the air. If you do that, you will mainly catch chaff, or, more probably, something much more deleterious. I hold, first, that we are not now at the beginning of criticism, but far on in it. I cannot shut out the possibility, that some things may yet be seen which at present we do not see. I expect that it will be so.

But it seems most reasonable to suppose that any fresh adjustments, if any are coming, will merge themselves into the old situation, so that afterwards we shall hardly be able to perceive that there is a change upon it; for really there will be none to any important practical purpose. I hold, secondly, that, with reference to all critical novelties, we are quite entitled to take up a precautionary position, and to sift pretensions scrupulously. We ought to do so, not only on the ground of the unchristian bias which is often present in these speculations, but also because we have important interests to guard, and because criticism, mainly occupied with what I have called the under side of Scripture, may very readily overrate the completeness of its proof and underrate the force of the objections to which it is exposed. And we may occupy such a position in the same way as the astronomers and mathematicians interpose their *caveat* against the periods demanded by the geologist, acknowledging that the periods they demand have some plausibility from their point of view, but pointing out that they are counter-indicated by evidence in another quarter. I hold that. But I should have little hope of the position being occupied successfully, and the work which the guardians of faith have to discharge being accomplished worthily, except in

connection with an express acknowledgment, and indeed vindication, of the right and duty of criticism to produce every likelihood which its proper methods fairly suggest, and to insist that the worth of them shall be fairly estimated, whether as indications of tracks of inquiry that claim to be pursued, or as proofs of conclusions that claim to be accepted. I would not feel myself to be a believer, unless I could cordially say that.

III.

ON THE DISCUSSION OF THE EVIDENCE IN CRITICAL QUESTIONS.

III.

THE object of this Lecture is not to present and value the actual evidence in any critical question, or in any set or section of such questions. What I intend, is to look at the general nature of the evidence which we may expect to meet with in this department; and some of the considerations which affect the process of judging its worth; and that, both on the side of critics, in their various schools; and also on the side of those who, not being critics, feel called upon to form a judgment, provisional or final, on certain critical questions; doing so in the interest of faith, and from that point of view.

Now let this be said first, that criticism is not a demonstrative science. It deals for the most part with probable evidence; and, therefore, putting a right estimate on the value of probabilities is a great part of the skill of a successful critic. To this skill of his, various

conditions are necessarily required. For example, in proportion as he has acquired familiar knowledge of the subject-matter in all its aspects and details, will he possess the materials requisite for an instructed and sound decision. But still more important is the sagacity he has —the native sense; exercised and trained by use, no doubt, but still native. This is the point at which men divide. The most brilliantly clever men may fail for want of this healthy soundness of understanding. They may perform remarkable exploits of insight, of dexterous combination, of inventive suggestion; but the decision really remains with the man of sense. Or, since you must have some ultimate appeal (every man pretending to be a man of sense, more or less), the decision remains ultimately with the sense of mankind, before which every cause is pleaded; in which all the various disturbing causes are supposed in a good degree to become merged and balanced; and which by its representative minds, deputed as it were to judge that cause, gravitates ultimately to a decision, or else gives sentence that there is not ground enough for any decision, and that the question must remain in doubt.

However, it does not follow that, because criticism deals with probable evidence, its con-

clusions are therefore necessarily uncertain. Probable evidence may vary indefinitely, through all degrees of strength and weakness; and it may be quite strong enough to establish a moral certainty. Many of the conclusions of criticism are established certainties; and some that were once debated, and admitted of debate, have now made good their place in the convictions of all competent judges, and are settled beyond reasonable likelihood of ever being unsettled again. That the Vatican MS. of the Bible, whatever its exact age may be, is a truly ancient MS.—*i.e.*, for example, earlier than the Middle Ages—is a conclusion that rests on probable evidence. There is no absolute demonstration against the possibility of its having been forged; but the unlikelihoods are so great and many, that no one troubles himself with the smallest doubt on the subject. The evidence is taken as practically equivalent to a demonstration. The age of the Apostolic Constitutions was once an unsettled point: it may be taken as fixed now, that the first six books are, in their present form, not earlier than the third century, and probably belong to the early part of the fourth. No one expects that this decision will ever again experience any considerable alteration. Still, it is the nature of probable conclusions—*i.e.*, conclusions of a considerable degree of probability

—that they may be overthrown by evidence, and even, in some cases, by very slight or accidental evidence; for all that is required is a proof that what was unlikely has come to pass. Now what is unlikely does sometimes come to pass, and proofs of it may turn up. It is, I should say, a conclusion of a good degree of probability that the Apostle Paul did not write the Epistle to the Hebrews, that we owe it to some other man, moved by the Spirit of God. Yet a document might conceivably be dug up out of Pompeii, or Herculaneum, which would at once demonstrate that the apostle was the author; and would at the same time account, perhaps, for some of the peculiarities that have appeared to point to a different conclusion.

Let us keep it in mind, then, that on many a point you may fairly say, "The critical evidence, as it stands, points on the whole to one conclusion, and renders it so far highly probable, and yet I am not entitled to assume the certainty of that conclusion; on the contrary, I *may* be entitled, on the ground of considerations arising from some other quarter, to hold my mind in suspense." Thus the work, as I said before, comes to be one of estimating the value of probabilities: how far the evidence in each case approaches to, or comes short of, establishing a practical moral certainty.

This will at once suggest to you how it comes to pass that you hear, in these matters, a great deal of rash assertion, which comes to nothing in the end. It is not that those who make the assertions have no ground at all to go upon, and it is not that they are willing to deceive. But they are not sound judges of evidence; they have fallen in love with a conclusion which they are anxious to justify, and under this influence they rate low probabilities as if they were high, and high probabilities as if they were low. Just think how many people jumped to conclusions about the Tichborne case, and how little those conclusions were worth, which commonly were announced with an emphasis proportioned to the incapacity of the man who announced them. Such infirmities befall learned men also—orthodox, heretics, and nondescripts; and therefore there is good reason for refusing to be greatly moved, merely because unsettling views are confidently put abroad, especially by the press, which naturally favours everything that creates excitement and discussion. And yet, on the other hand, you must not take for granted that all received views are right, and all innovating views wrong. Just because of the nature of the questions and the evidence, just because of the infirmities of the human mind in matters of this kind, it is possible, and

not unlikely, that amid the views which press for reception, and are rejected by the general mind, some will prove to have something in them. In their present form, or in some modified form, they will make good their footing yet. In matters of this kind general consent of the majority may for a long time be against the real weight of the evidence. I suppose I may take it as settled in our minds that Protection is a mistake, and Free Trade is the true theory of trade for all parties. In this country we believe so, and we have some right to our opinion, having tried to look well at both sides of the question. But once it was not the received theory here; and in the United States, as well as in some of our own colonies, a quite different sentiment still generally prevails. Protection is, in these quarters, the received way of it; while to us it is quite certain that a change must ultimately come in those communities also, though meanwhile interests may grow up that will make the process of change difficult. Therefore I add, thirdly, that it is very safe to wait; it is pretty certain, in the long run, that, even in these matters, any proposition, for which cogent and sufficient evidence can be produced, will settle itself in the general mind. The pressure of evidence on the representative minds, those to which the general mind trusts, produces its

effect. If it fails with one generation, it makes way with the next. What is fairly established by historical evidence is received; and, when it is received, it does not ordinarily produce any very remarkable change in the leading thoughts or beliefs of men. Some change it may and does produce; but, on the whole, it adjusts itself into the general system of things without any great trouble.

Now I will name at random two or three specimens out of the many kinds of evidence which criticism makes use of. You may have, in the first place, testimonies,—writers reporting things as known to them, or as alleged by earlier authors whom they have read. Here comes in the task of estimating the value of these testimonies or reports. The value of them may vary exceedingly according to circumstances. Only, as the greatest of liars cannot refer to a man or a book, if man and book do not yet exist, a reference of that kind, if you can fix the date of it, and be sure that it does refer to the very subject under discussion, is of the highest value in building up historical arguments. Then, again, you have arguments from the internal qualities of books. If a book refers to a person or an event, it cannot itself be earlier in date than the person or event; barring, of course, cases in which it is fair to hold the reference to be pro-

phetic. This would be conclusive, in its way, if references were always unambiguous. But perhaps there is a doubt; the reference is not a clear one. "Then," you say, "it proves nothing." But wait a moment. In the next page you find another apparent reference; not quite clear this one either. Still, that shall go for little or nothing. But half-a-dozen more presently occur, of different kinds, all pointing in the same direction. Now you can't help thinking there is something in it. And, in fact, you may be irresistibly convinced at last that the author of one book was acquainted with another book, or with a certain set of historical occurrences, though no one of the references, taken singly, amounts to a demonstration of it. Again, there are arguments from style, sometimes in the highest degree fanciful and worthless, sometimes absolutely convincing and conclusive, sometimes only amounting to a moderate presumption. Then a single word may be made to bear the burden of an inference. In the dispute about the Letters of Ignatius, an important part was once played by the Greek word σιγη—silence. It was alleged, on one side, that the word could not have been used, with the peculiar allusion there intended, till after the date of Ignatius's death; and the other side strove to find reasons for thinking that perhaps it could. But,

indeed, there is no limit to the forms in which connections of things, and therefore arguments, may be alleged. I saw the other day a very ingenious effort to prove that a Greek Christian writing which claims high antiquity, and has been received and quoted by all recent authors without hesitation, is, after all, no ancient writing, but was composed since the revival of letters. And one of the lines of argument was an elaborate exhibition of the passages of sundry Pagan authors, from which the writer, it was said, manifestly got his Greek. It was alleged to be as good as demonstrated that the writer of the Christian treatise had made a servile use of all those various passages; and it was argued that no genuine Christian writer of antiquity could possibly have made use of them in this way.

I mention these specimens of the various kinds of evidence which may have to be resorted to in critical researches, in order to impress you with the truth of the general statement, that criticism works with probable evidence. The success of its operations depends on rightly estimating the value of probabilities of very different kinds, and, what is still more difficult, rightly comparing the value, as proof, of those different kinds of evidence when they happen to be applicable to one and the same subject of discussion. Habitual con-

versancy with these pursuits is fitted, as I said before, to form a certain tact, or instinctive aptitude, for perceiving the value of all these indications. By this tact, or aptitude of the critics, we who are not critics may benefit. Only, that we may not be led blindfold, we must ask them to show us what they see, and to point out to us the principles on which they come to their conclusion.

There is no doubt that, in many of the operations of criticism, useful and valid conclusions are reached by the combination of things—little things, which do not seem to the common observer to have any instruction in them. The critic perceives in the work he is examining a set of fine and subtle indications, the combined effect of which none but a trained eye would have discerned. Criticism, which has often been fanciful enough, has sometimes been scoffed at, for making much of delicate and subtle lines; but criticism is not always wrong on these occasions. You have all seen pictures which at first sight show nothing but a group of trees, with a filling up of other objects. But on inspection you find that the lines of the trees are so disposed, as to give the outline of the figure and face of some well-known person. It is a very subtle and inconspicuous tracing; but it is undeniably real, and it proves to be a material

part of the picture, when you come to see it. The critic, properly so called, is a man who has a gift for catching sight of such things, and making use of them; and then, if he takes proper pains to show them to me, I can see them for myself. But once, I remember, when some friends were spending an evening with me, we had such a picture as I have spoken of passed round. Now so it was, that one of my friends (who is discerning enough in matters of more importance) could by no demonstration whatever be got to discern the figure in the trees. After all our efforts had been spent upon him, he could not see it. And so there are people who never can see what the critics have to show, even when they have something real to show. They deny that there is anything to be seen, and abuse the critics. Now my friend did not do that in the other case.

But, then, on the other hand, it is to be remembered that there is an eagerness in the critic's nature; he would always be seeing something, especially something that common people cannot see, or at any rate have not seen. Therefore, unless he is exceptionally self-restraining, he may persuade himself that he is seeing something remarkable, when all the time he is deluding himself with mere arbitrary combinations. And this too can be illus-

trated. You have sat before a fire, and seen a face in the glowing embers. Now that face, though it might be worth looking at for its lifelike suggestiveness, was nothing real; not a face objectively and actually presented to you. Move your head a little way, and the likeness vanishes. It was all in your point of view, aided by your fancy. In itself it was a meaningless, fortuitous collocation of pieces of glowing cinders, which at a certain angle yielded a deceptive perspective to your eye. So it is sometimes with the critics. I should think this sometimes befalls them all, even the best of them. Therefore there is room for the question, "What *is* this the critic says he sees?" There is a great man, for whom I have a very sincere veneration (Mr. Gladstone), who spends some of his scanty leisure in critical studies on Homer. Now in regard to some of the deep and beautiful things he brings out, the question is just this, Are they figures in the trees, or figures in the embers?

Therefore the critic must make good to the public, I mean to the public which studies such things, the method of his researches, and the proof of his results; he must make them see it, and establish it by evidence. I make no doubt that there are men who acquire such an instinctive tact in these matters, that often they

are sure of a conclusion beyond what they can make appear with evidence to others. Where others can be made to see no sufficient evidence, this man has, in his own mind, a valid assurance. Still others cannot accept it from him on trust. It is like the case of uncorroborated tradition; it may be true, but it may also be a case of self-deception. If he is right, he will benefit by his conviction, in being put on the track of further discoveries. But nothing can be taken on trust, even from the most expert critic. It must be proved by evidence to a public so far instructed, that they are competent jurymen in the cause.

But now I want to look with you, for a little, at some of the principles which apply to this process which is always going on, this estimating of the probabilities.

And, in the first place, you will see that much depends on the habits of mind of the person who makes the estimate; and, in particular, on the region of thought and study with which he is chiefly familiar.

Take the theologian, who has perhaps a general acquaintance with the methods and results of criticism, but has not eminently worked in that department. *He* is more familiar with the principles through which faith is expounded and in which it is embodied. He is also

accustomed, perhaps, to contemplate the way in which various principles work in human minds, and the conclusions to which they eventually lead. He is accustomed to represent to himself the fixed points, both about the Bible and about its teaching, by which we must hold, if a firm position is in the long run to be maintained. He draws out and weighs the general statements, under which if the particular facts and teachings range themselves, a tenable order and connection of thought will arise. He is impressed with the conviction that, in the long run, the mind will bring its beliefs to a unity of thought. Therefore he is all alive to the range of responsibilities and consequences which every admission will be found to imply. It will often happen that to such a man a critical conclusion is presented, which strikes him at once as unacceptable. The question instantly rises for him, "How will it work? What effect will it produce on a given system of connected thoughts and beliefs?" So his attitude is fixed: he says, "There may be indications that are capable of being interpreted"—perhaps he will say of being perverted—"in favour of this conclusion; but there is no proof—nothing that deserves to be called clear proof; and against it there lies the conclusive argument that it unsettles or subverts, in itself or by its natural

consequences, principles which rest on the teaching of Scripture, which pertain to faith, and which, if they could be subverted, would leave a ruinous breach, an incurable confusion in the system of faith, or even in the foundations of it." Or, again, if he is not prepared to assert so much, he may see ground to impute to the supposed critical conclusion at least a tendency that way, which involves it, to his mind, in very serious improbability. On the other side, the critic (even if he be a believer) may be less conversant with considerations of that kind; or he may be less disposed to be impressed by them, having come to think that they are generally too confidently taken up. But his familiarity with the processes and facts of criticism gives him a peculiar sense of the value of the indications on which criticism relies. They may be stronger to his mind than he is able to prove them to be to any one not conversant with the same kind of work; just as a sailor may form judgments about the prospects of the weather, with a degree of assurance which he cannot communicate to a landsman by any process of reasoning. The critic then will be disposed to say, "There lies here not only *a* probability, but a very high probability;" perhaps he will say, so high as practically to settle the question. Now if there were present

that rare quality, perfect candour, and each were to manifest it, then perhaps we should hear the theologian saying, "I admit there is a probability on critical grounds for the conclusion which you present, and perhaps a higher probability than as yet I see; notwithstanding, your position appears to me irreconcilable with other positions which, on grounds of their own, adequate and commanding, I have learned to hold, and am constrained to maintain." And, on the other hand, the critic, if he be a believing critic (for an unbelieving one is not bound in logic to so much ceremony), might say, "I admit that from the point of view of your department there are inferential difficulties not easily got over; notwithstanding, I am convinced that what I maintain has a basis in facts, to which it is my duty to give full effect." Now one or other may have made a mistake; or the truth may be that each ought to modify somewhat the form or substance of what he maintains. But the *tendency* of each may be stated thus: a man is likely to estimate correctly on which side of any question the probabilities lie that are supplied by the field in which he himself works; but he is prone to overestimate the amount or weight of the probability afforded by his own field. He is apt to make more of it than it deserves.

The position here assigned to the theologian is grounded rather on a general presumption, which remains as it is; you cannot make more of it. On the other side is more of the vivacity of investigation, discovery, addition of fresh and detailed material. Hence it is natural and easy to settle all such cases summarily as cases of "prejudice against fact." But this is no good universal rule. It is quite fair to say that settled principles should not be subverted except on cogent grounds.

Meanwhile I observe, still speaking from the point of view of faith, that the theologian is conscious that he guards the higher interest, and therefore he feels himself justified in a more intense solicitude. He may not be a wise or well-advised guardian of it; but it is the higher interest he guards. For it is more important that the church's thoughts about God and God's Word should be true, on the whole, to the type set for them by Revelation, than that the church should become acquainted with some interesting fact in the department of criticism, even if it concerns the form and vesture of God's Word itself. If the two could be finally incompatible, which I of course deny, then the first were to be preferred. And though they cannot be finally incompatible, yet, during the period of suspense, the superior weight of

the higher interest is a just ground of solicitude. But, then, upon the other hand, as they cannot be finally incompatible, it must be acknowledged that, when the critic fairly makes out his point by reasonable evidence, resistance must cease. For he is upon his own domain; and within the domain of each science, the evidence proper to that science, when it reaches a certain degree of strength, must be allowed to prevail over inferential difficulties or improbabilities arising from other quarters. In fact, in that case the theologian has mistaken the true interests of faith, either in the principles he has been led to lay down, or, at least, in the application of them, which proposed to exclude the critical conclusion as irreconcilable with faith.

But let us proceed. Still speaking of the habits of mind which the workman brings to his work, it is plain how much will depend on the antecedent principles, or presumptions, which he thinks it reasonable to hold for certain before he begins, and which he means to apply as occasion offers. A very obvious and important example is offered by those critics who decline to admit, in any case, anything supernatural. Renan, for instance, says that he takes it for a fixed principle that in historical discussions the supernatural is to be excluded. Observe the consequences. You have to deal with a series

of books which continually imply, or express, the supernatural, one way or another. You bring with you a sweeping principle, which determines that, in every instance, this is contrary to fact. Any probabilities, disclosed by examination of the books, that lie against this assumption, must be overruled or explained away. Any that favour it, will naturally be made the most of. Date, authorship, everything must be settled on these conditions. And you will observe that the effect of this is most extensive. When the critic goes on to questions, in which the supernatural is not involved at all, he goes on with a number of points fixed, and also with precedents as to what is to pass for a probability, and what not, in such books as these. I am not imputing this as a trick in controversy. It is the effect of a formed conviction, operating on the critical process. Some—not all, certainly—of those who adopt this principle, have shown a large amount of candour in other respects. But, of course, the principle itself disables a man from making an unbiassed estimate of the actual evidence.

In saying this it is right perhaps to make a distinction. It is true, and can be proved, that ancient writers were more open to believe and report supernatural occurrences, than any of us now are: they had no such sense of an

unlikelihood to be overcome, as we have. Therefore, in working simply on critical grounds, previous, in argument, to the belief of the authority and inspiration of the writers, it would be reasonable enough to refuse to take supernatural occurrences on their report, until the nature of the evidence had been well examined. I make no objection to that. I am objecting to a far more sweeping and objectionable principle. It may be right also to say, that quite likely the bias in this respect operates on both sides. We, impressed with the truth and the preciousness of a supernatural revelation, may be disposed to over-estimate proofs, or what look like proofs, and to under-estimate difficulties. A candid man endeavours to estimate evidence just as it is.

The preliminary denial of the supernatural, for instance, influences at every turn the criticism of the gospels. If Christ is what He claimed to be, if He signalised His presence on the earth by mighty works of mercy, if He rose from the dead,—then we have the supernatural in a most emphatic manifestation: and so the gospels report. It might once have been possible to maintain that those narratives are a tissue of deliberate fabrications, so far as the supernatural element goes; but that will not be maintained now. Criticism itself, even the un-

friendliest, discerns a character in those books diverse from that. And therefore it becomes indispensable to frame a theory of the manner of their origin, and to fix their date, so as to make it intelligible how the legend could take the form it has taken, without imputing to any one of those through whom it took shape, too deliberate an intention to mislead. I do not mean, of course, that all critical difficulties in the gospels are created by the denial of the supernatural. Difficulties remain even when this perverting influence is removed.

Another instance, and one worth specifying for the sake of some circumstances connected with it, is the critical discussion on Isaiah. Various theories about the Book of the Prophecy of Isaiah have been successively put forth. One of the most important and notorious is that which ascribes the latter portion, beginning with the fortieth chapter, to a different and a later author from the earlier part. This has been maintained from the point of view of the denial of the supernatural. The latter part of the book has in view the Babylonish captivity, and sets forth, as the hope of the church, the restoration and return under Cyrus. If this was written by Isaiah, it was a prediction, so clear and specific as to imply supernatural information of coming events. The critics now referred to

admit that prophetic men, under a high excitement of their minds, might contemplate the working out of forces or of principles already operating around them; and so they might utter remarkable yet vague forecastings and auguries of the future. But the possibility of real prediction they deny. Therefore Isaiah, whose later days fell in the reign of Hezekiah, when Assyria, not Babylon, was still the conquering power that predominated in the world, could not be the writer of these predictions. It must have been some one who lived in the days of the Babylonish captivity, and who celebrated the restoration which he already saw preparing or beginning. This argument, you see, with all the conclusions based on it, implies the denial of the supernatural. But while I ask you to notice that, I must at the same time observe that the same view of the distinct origin of the latter part of Isaiah is maintained by another party on distinct grounds. And I have selected this example very much for the purpose of showing, that you have not always the same reasons and motives, where you have the same formal critical position. There are believing critics who do not doubt the possibility of real prediction or of the supernatural generally, but who think they have observed this to be the manner of prophecy in point of fact, viz., that

the prophet, speaking primarily for his own contemporaries, makes their position and their experience, which he himself shares, his starting point; and however far his predictions may range, he projects them on the horizon of the existing situation. If, then, in the latter part of Isaiah we have a prophet whose point of departure is the Babylonish captivity as an event already come, and who, from that point of view surveys a future, these critics think it is congruous to the general manner of prophecy to believe that this is a prophet for whom the Babylonish captivity was actual present experience, *i.e.*, who lived at that time. This kind of reasoning is supported by other alleged reasons for recognising here another pen from Isaiah's, and also by arguments to show that we need not think it strange to find two sets of prophecies merged into one book, and passing under one name. But the argument I have specified is the fundamental one. For my own part, looking to the fact that Isaiah certainly had the Babylonish captivity in view, as the destiny that was to swallow up Jewish hopes and plans of quite another kind, I cannot see strength in the general argument which judges it quite unlikely that he should have been employed to utter this prophecy, as from the standpoint of one surrounded by the actual

disasters of the captivity. And, unless I deceive myself, I certainly think I hear the same wonderful strain of inspired poetry in the earlier and later prophecies of the book, the unity prevailing amid any minor differences. Only I should admit that, for me at least, the naming of Cyrus is a difficulty. Not that I have any doubt that God could enable His servant to name any person, yet unborn, who was to be connected with God's providences towards His people; but it certainly seems to me to be a departure from the method generally observed, and therefore to be expected, in the ordering of prophecy concerning things to come. Still, I do not feel it to be a difficulty great enough to overcome the other considerations, or one that warrants the, as I think, violent expedient of summoning up a new anonymous prophet, equal to or greater than Isaiah. However, my object is not to discuss this question, which indeed I am not qualified to do. My object is only to point out that in the one form of it we have to do with men who deny the supernatural, in the other we have to do with men who believe the supernatural, but who think they have observed a manner in the economy or administration of it, which leads them in this case to infer distinct and later authorship.

Now I go on to remark that whenever you

have to deal with probable evidence you must attend to the effect of the *combination* of probabilities. If it is not quite easy to form a judgment of the value or weight of each separate probability, still less easy is it to form a judgment of the combined value of several or many; and so much the more difficult is it to arrive soon at a general agreement in cases of that kind. If one could put a numerical value on each probability, you could calculate the combined effect of them, reckoned as odds. But, as that is impossible, the decision depends on the judgment of skilled persons, in the first place; and, in the second place, on the general judgment of those before whom those skilled persons plead their reasons. But this in general is to be said, that probabilities separately slight, or at least not by any means conclusive, may acquire a very high value, or may become quite conclusive, when combined. And therefore, in any critical argument, the logic of the case is not satisfied unless the effect of the combined evidence is estimated, as well as the weight due to each separate part taken separately. It is at this point that critics, on opposing sides, generally fail most conspicuously to do justice. It requires an effort of mind in favour of the opposite side, from which it is not difficult to excuse oneself. I think I must add,

more particularly, that at this point defenders of views received in the church, often do less than justice to the argument of those who plead for an altered view, *e.g.*, as to age, or authorship, or some particular part of Scripture. The argument is often conducted in this way: The reasons offered for this critical opinion cannot pretend, any of them, to amount to more than probabilities, and they are these, *a*, *b*, *c*, *d*, and so on. Now *a* is so far from being a conclusive reason that it does not even amount to a strong presumption; and *b*, though it may be stronger, is still no proof; and as to *c*, a suggestion can be offered to explain how *c* may consist with the age generally accepted; and so on to the end. Now that may be all true, but it is no sufficient argument. You must face the *combined force* of the probabilities, whatever it may be worth. For anything I know, the separate indications of a late age in the Book of Ecclesiastes may all be separately explained away without a great strain on one's sense of the possible and the probable. But that, to me, is no satisfaction at all. For, really, what I have to deal with is the improbability of a book of an early age *combining* all those separate and independent marks of a late one.

I pass to a somewhat different subject when I speak of the importance to be attached to the

amount of contemporary light which can be brought to bear on a critical question. How much material is there, altogether, out of which one can hope to draw evidence upon the point in hand? Critical research can only deal with the materials which it has got. It says: "These materials, which are all I can find, point to such and such conclusions." Now the intrinsic force of probability yielded by the existing material, and the strength thereby acquired to the conclusion, is one thing; but there is another thing, viz., the quantity of materials—are there materials *enough* to justify confidence in the conclusion? Be it that the evidences existing point wholly or mainly one way, so far as they point in any direction at all; still, do they sufficiently represent the evidences which perhaps once existed?

There are some ages of the world's history, and periods of its literature, for which very copious materials exist. In such cases you can confront any literary monument, alleged to belong to it, with various contemporary specimens. When you proceed to critical investigation you can prosecute the research on various sides, and always on firm ground. When you have completed it, if it yields definite conclusions or strong probabilities, you can say, "These results stand uncontradicted, although

there are many witnesses of that age, or those ages, extant;" or you can say, "These results are attested by various witnesses, by indications drawn from many independent quarters." That gives strength and stability to the position. On the other hand there are ages of the world, there are periods of literature, and sections of literature, with respect to which we enjoy no such advantages. Even in periods that are very well known on the whole, there are spots or regions involved, as it were, in shadow, for which materials fail us. There is a heartbreaking hiatus, for instance, or feebly illumined region, in the Christian history, at the very end of the first century and during the early part of the second. Any critic, of a moderate degree of zeal and public spirit, would willingly be transported for life, if by that sacrifice he could procure and restore to the world a very few lost works pertaining to that period, or bearing on it. As it is, the most cautious critics have often to feel their way up to it, and through it, in a darkling manner; and every now and then speculation runs riot through the darkness. It is not very different with the early Hebrew history, the period of the Pentateuch and the Judges. You have the Biblical narrative. But you have no wealth of material, Jewish or Gentile, contemporary with the period, thoroughly

understood and accessible, with which to confront it. It is different when you come down to the period, for instance, of the prophets. There, accordingly, men of all tendencies are agreed that, independently of inspired authority, and judging according to principles applicable to any literature whatever, we are upon comparatively firm ground.

It appears to me that this circumstance ought to qualify the confidence of critics in the judgments they form, on mere critical grounds, on questions regarding, for example, the earlier books of the Hebrew canon. And I think it ought to qualify the confidence which we, the Christian public, repose in the opinions formed by critics on some of those questions. I have in view especially opinions as to the age of their composition. I do not assume at present that the reasons for the age commonly or traditionally assigned are strong and conclusive. Assume, if you like, for the present purpose, that all opinions are suspended. What I say, then, is, that critics are here reduced to more scanty materials. They have to rely upon examination of the books themselves, and comparison of them with books very much later than the events to which the Pentateuch refers, much later, I may surely say, than the age to which, at first sight at least, and on a general view, the

Pentateuch, as a series of books, seems itself to belong. Let us suppose that all critical authorities should agree in saying that the balance of the critical evidence, when fairly considered, is in favour of assigning those books to such and such an age, different to that heretofore imputed to them. Then I should still think it fair to say that here, from the circumstances of the case, the line of evidence has become thin, not to add that the quality of some of it is speculative and precarious. That is not the fault of the critics. Their business is not to create materials, but to make what they can of the materials that exist, and to estimate the combined result of the indications which they yield. All I say is, that the circumstances of the case directly and powerfully tend to diminish the attainable strength of evidence. And that should be considered in weighing the worth of it.

I do not mean by this to deny that you may draw clear proof from a book itself for a later date than was once ascribed to it, even when you have access to no literature contemporary with the date heretofore assigned. You may find proof in the book itself, and in the indications of subsequent literature. But, then, I am not speaking of a clear case, but of a disputable one. And the case being disputable, I point out that the resources for ending the dis-

pute are, providentially, narrow—narrower than we could wish them to be.

As I think this point of some importance, I will illustrate it a little further. There are two books you would do well to read, if you wish to accustom yourselves to know what critical work is, apart from the sacred and exciting interests which attach to the Bible. Both contain a good deal that is dry; but criticism is dry work commonly. One of these is Bentley's Phalaris, to which I alluded in the first Lecture. The other is Daillé's treatise on the writings ascribed to Dionysius the Areopagite. It is in the same volume with another critical effort of his, viz., his examination of the Letters ascribed to Ignatius of Antioch. The case as to Ignatius is still under discussion; the latest important work[1] in the controversy defends with great ability the genuineness of one text of those Letters; and perhaps we are not yet at the last word. But while Daillé inflicted heavy blows on the Letters of Ignatius, he wholly and completely demolished Dionysius the Areopagite. Both these treatises, then, both Bentley's and Daillé's, are instances in which criticism demonstrates that particular books are later, by hundreds of years, than the date to which they

[1] Zahn's, who also annotates Ignatius in the edition of the Apostolic Fathers by Gebhardt and Harnack.

had been assigned. Well, if you will read them, you will be struck with the copiousness of proof which those very learned men thought fit to apply to make out their point. They do not content themselves with one set of indications or two. They set in motion various lines of proof, and make them converge upon the point with a cogency and completeness which are very striking. And those converging lines of proof are derived from the various sources opened to them by great fields of literature, which Bentley and Daillé thoroughly well knew. Now, that is the very thing I miss in the reasonings on the age of early books in the Hebrew canon. And if any one says, "Such work is here impossible: the means do not exist for it;" why, that is just what I say. I blame nobody, least of all the critic. You do what you can, as far as you can possibly see, to test the age of the book; but I find the means do not exist to enable me to test the value of your testing, as I should like to do. If your estimate of the evidence is fair on the whole, then, I see, I cannot set the book higher than a certain age, *on critical grounds*. But is there anything very conclusive or constraining to hinder me from thinking that it *may* be higher than that age after all? There may be; the critic may have made out his point by evidence, under all his

disadvantages. I am not discussing critical questions, but pointing out considerations that bear on the value of the evidence when they are discussed.[1]

I have said that I do not deny the possibility of conclusive proof in such circumstances, though I note the way in which the value of the evidence seems to be affected. Perhaps I ought to add, that I have not the least intention of suggesting that criticism cannot attain to practical certainties of various kinds, even when the cross lights of contemporary literature are inaccessible. For example, I do not think the evidence can be resisted in favour of the use and incorporation in the Book of Genesis of independent documents, distinguished, among other peculiarities, by the names they employ for the Divine Being. That fact, as I believe it to be, has been discredited by attempts of critics to break up the existing text into its original parts, and to show the exact margin of every fragment. Yet, I believe it to be quite true, and capable of proof, that distinct and distinguishable documents look out upon us from large portions of the text of Genesis. The question happens to have a special interest for me, which I mention, because I observe that egotism is acceptable in

[1] See notes A and B.

the case of lecturers. Long ago, as a young minister, I began to lecture on Genesis, in the days when Knobel's Commentary was recent and the first edition of Delitzsch was just out. I need hardly say I did not give my people any of Knobel nor of Delitzsch, but I put in practice the "precautionary position," which I maintained to be reasonable in a former Lecture, and thought the questions out for myself as my lectures went on. I held out on the old lines as long as the materials were looked at piecemeal, one by one. I was obliged to give in when I allowed the whole case to stand before me, and to impress its own actual lines on my mind, over a course of years. But I should hardly have alluded to this topic except that I may add that I received another impression, equally distinct and abiding. And that is the unity of Genesis. Whatever materials were drawn into its plan, and may still be visible to us there, the book as it stands is no fortuitous collection, neither is it a mere harmonising, by selection, of several original sources. It is in the highest sense a work of design. The parts are wonderfully proportioned to the design of the whole; and the progress of them is, in the highest degree, subtle, exquisite, and harmonious. I do not know whether the human author's mind was employed to project and execute the plan, or whether the higher

Agent guided his unconscious steps to make the music of this perfect book.

Now I pass over, I may say, to another side of things. In the estimate of critical evidence, of the worth and result of the considerations it presents, an important place belongs practically to a class of considerations which are in their own nature separate; so that, instead of ranking them along with the other evidence, we ought rather to look at them by themselves. They make their appearances as counter-presumptions to certain kinds of critical opinion. They set against any evidence, real or supposed, which those opinions possess, an antecedent presumption of unlikelihood or impossibility, which it is alleged cannot be overcome. These are the presumptions resting on or derived from the faith of the church about the Bible as divine, conveying to us the message of God, and including some information from Him about the manner in which we should think of the Bible itself, and the use we ought to make of it. In the strength of that conviction, critical opinions have been and are repelled; any likelihood they may have is held annulled, by the greater unlikelihood, or impossibility, of that faith deceiving us. The consideration of this belongs to my subject, though it is somewhat arduous to begin upon, when so much of my Lecture is spent and so little remains.

That there are great convictions built up in the mind by various and reiterated evidences, proved in experience, and associated with our deepest moral life, which supply us with valid regulative presumptions, is surely plain: there are such things, and there ought to be. Take the belief in the living God, who speaks, and hears, and acts; who knows me, and calls me to know Him. I may enter into discussion with an atheist; and, if I do, I must endeavour to be perfectly candid, neither to overrate the force of my arguments, nor to disallow the force of any of his. But, certainly, I will tell him at the outset that he need not think that many real difficulties which he can produce, and I cannot explain, will be enough to subvert my belief. I will tell him, also, that the conviction I have is surer, and more variously grounded, than I can make evident in argument; and that my argument failing, or coming short, will be no proof to me that my conviction is groundless. I will tell him that I know it is in itself possible that my mind upon the great question may change; but I will also tell him that I think it most unlikely that it should, and that in my present mind I regard such a change as among the saddest of conceivable calamities. This I would tell him, and this I should maintain my right in reason to tell him. At the same time,

I acknowledge that my thoughts about God may well be capable, not only of being deepened and widened, but also of being amended. There may cling to them elements that are groundless, or unreasonable, or opposed to facts, and therefore to evidence which God Himself has providentially supplied. These defects or errors may be exposed by argument, and therefore I must hold myself open to that,—no doubt with care, lest under the name of amendment and correction I admit something that virtually annuls or inevitably impairs the central conviction by which I have so much reason to abide. Subject to that qualification I think that my readiness to face any consideration and any fact bearing on the subject, will be very much in proportion to the intensity, strength, and assuredness of my belief in God's existence, and His incomparable glory.

I might make a similar statement about faith in Christ, or in Christian revelation, *mutatis mutandis*.

And now I observe that, in its own place and way, the Bible also becomes the object of a conviction and mode of feeling—(in these cases both go together —) of the same general description. For, not only in general Christian revelation, or the truth as it is in Jesus, but more specifically the Bible, is an object of faith. It holds that

place, not indeed in quite the same fundamental and absolute way, not with quite the same essential necessity, as those other objects of faith, already referred to; for a man might be a Christian on the report of the truth, who had never had his attention turned to the Bible as the record of it; yet it holds its place, really and validly. The Scriptures, as something more specific than the revelation, are specified as the object of divine testimony and divine care, and are commended to me for reception and improvement. Moreover, they emerge upon me, out of history, in a manner that is quite peculiar, and that challenges a unique regard; and they have verified their office amply to believing men of all generations. So that a conviction about the Bible, of the same general description as those others, takes its place as something actual and valid; and like those others, though not with quite the same primary, absolute, conclusive cogency, it will claim to regulate our minds in dealing with specific arguments; for it is itself the result of various and weighty arguments, and it sums up in itself all the force which belongs to *them*.

When the full strength of a conviction like this comes into legitimate operation one may ask, What can stand against it? what can prevail to overthrow it? Certainly not mere pro-

babilities, and likelihoods, and difficulties. And if you suppose the case that there could be set against it an array of moral certainties, established by criticism, or history, or otherwise, on evidence that left no possibility of doubt, one could only say that there would emerge a state of things extremely distressing and perplexing. Of course, our belief in the Bible is virtually a belief that that state of things will not be realised. But the point I want you to notice is the precise character of the state of things which commonly enough has been realised. Often when, in connection with critical assertions, the conviction about the Bible moves in the minds of believing men, and their susceptibilities on that side are awakened, the real question, after all, is not, whether that conviction is to be sacrificed, but what, and how much, does it really require? What is it reasonable to maintain on the strength of it? What is the fair and valid application of it? How far, and to what things, does the force of it extend? Now I have not the same absolute conviction about *all* these things, that inspires the central conviction itself. In it there is combined the strength of argument, and feeling, and experience, and, as I believe, of a divine witness; but the others are matters of argument and definition. So that all I may be able to say is that

the belief about the Bible, which I am justified in cherishing, *appears to me* to operate against a certain critical conclusion, and that with a *certain degree*—perhaps I may say a high degree —of clearness; or, it appears to me unlikely, perhaps highly unlikely, that the one can be reconciled with the other; I cannot see how it can be done; I do not think it can. Now this, you see, in its own way comes to be a question of probabilities, or likelihoods. And in each case of this kind, what I have now suggested is a new kind of probability, the worth of which has to be reckoned, fairly reckoned, if possible; and also has to be compared, on some sound principle of comparison, with the probabilities that may be pressing from another side in the shape of evidence of another kind.

Presumptions, such as those now specified, may be extremely strong. I would say, for instance, that in reference to questions about the gospels, the influence of such a presumption is very evident and powerful in the case of all believing thinkers and students. It may be stated in this way, that there is an indefinitely strong presumption against *any* literary theory of the gospels that is inconsistent with their being, all four, authentic and authoritative narratives of the events and sayings of our Lord's life. Therefore, for example, which is the next

step, they must be relatively, early. I think it fair to say, and right to acknowledge, that we have a stronger conviction of that view of the literary phenomenon, than corresponds *merely* to the strength of proof derivable from the traditions of the early church, and to that derivable from critical investigation generally; although certainly such investigation leaves ample room for, and agrees thoroughly well with, the view referred to. It will be observed at the same time that this common presumption does not lead all in whom it operates to an exact agreement. Men differ as to the effect to be given to it when one comes to details, and deals with critical evidence about details.

A presumption, less strong and cogent, but surely by no means trifling, is that which (even apart from any question of the authority of New Testament notices) exists in favour of the Mosaic origin of the Pentateuch. That is not a *mere* tradition. It is the impression suggested to one generation after another by the connection in which the books would naturally be thought to exist with the historical situation they exhibit. This presumption may be capable of being overcome by evidence arising from closer scrutiny. But it is a strong and reasonable presumption; so much so that it is *most* unlikely ever to prove a *mere* mistake — un-

likely that it should not embody a very substantial kernel of reality.

But, in all such cases, a presumption which operates with indefinite force as long as it is uncontradicted (and which, therefore, associates itself with many sacred impressions) is at once put to test as to its grounds when it is encountered by evidences, even of a probable kind, arising from another quarter. And in regard to the strongest of them, there is always a question as to the scope to be accorded to it, and the manner and degree in which it ought to be relied upon, when we have to appreciate the various considerations bearing on specific historical details. The tendency nowadays is to place less reliance on general presumptions, when questions of historical detail are in hand on which tolerable specific evidence is accessible. For experience has suggested that we are more likely, in that case, to have a just impression of the general relations illuminated and confirmed by correction of our historical knowledge of details, than to have our details kept right by applying to them our conception of the general relations.

Now that is what I want mainly to impress on your minds in this Lecture; that in many of these cases which disquiet our minds, when we have not that kind of demonstration which at

once ends all debate; where, therefore, dispute arises; what we have really in hand is the mutual pressure of probabilities, probabilities of various kinds, that arise from various quarters, and claim to be estimated and compared. Our minds ought to be brought into the attitude and temper suitable to that state of the case. More particularly where the interests of faith seem to come up, and the right view of the Bible perhaps is felt to be more or less involved, what you really have in hand, in many cases, is not a collision between historical evidence and faith in the Bible. It is a collision between historical evidence, or certain probabilities which it supplies, and *other* probabilities—not less than probabilities, yet not more; possibly very strong, and possibly not so strong—that arise in connection with faith.

I am the more anxious to press this view of the case,—it is obvious enough certainly, but I think it requires to be pressed,—because on any other terms we shall not get, and I do not know that we ought to get, the considerations I am now speaking of regarded at all. If we plead them too high we shall have them tossed overboard. And, in fact, there has been a cry of Wolf! so often, there has been so much of a disposition to plead faith and divine authority point-blank against alleged evidence, and that

sometimes with discreditable results, that there is a danger of thoughtful men ceasing to regard that side of the question. There is a danger of the likelihoods of criticism carrying all before them. Now, I think, there is an interest here to be guarded, if we can guard it wisely. Some think that we should concede to criticism the right to work out its own results, taking no responsibility about them, showing no antagonism to any of them, assured that, in the end of the day, all established facts will be found harmonising with all well-warranted faith. That is not a view in which I can acquiesce. I think criticism, even as carried on by believing men, needs an influence arising from the point of view of those who represent simply the interests of the common faith. I think it is the better of having to reckon with that. Critical probabilities are often no more than critical plausibilities. Besides, criticism, full of scientific enthusiasm for methods formed and proved in the field of general literature, is in danger of not always rightly estimating how the divine element in the Scripture modifies the problem and qualifies the results. It is the business and the point of honour of criticism to do the utmost and the very best that can be done with the natural, the historical, the common laws and the common conditions; and in this case criti-

cism is none the worse for a certain counter-pressure to compel her to make her work peculiarly sure, when her problems are peculiarly delicate. No doubt the perfect believing critic would perfectly balance all these considerations, without any pressure; but we are none of us perfect; and we help one another by the mutual pressure of the gifts we have received, nay, even of our infirmities. Every day of my life I fall in with critical opinions which I find myself dismissing from my mind as opinions which I am not going to adopt, partly no doubt because I don't think it likely any strong evidence will be found in support of them; but partly also because, whatever presumptions could be pleaded for them, I rate highly the presumptions arising against them, from their apparent incongruity with what appears to me to be a sound and reasonable view of the Bible. I think I act rationally in doing so. But in many of these cases, I should not be acting rationally, if I put my decision higher than an estimate of evidence, resulting in a certain degree of confidence, but subject to be reconsidered if new evidence appears. I should not be acting rationally, if I put my decision so high, as to make it an irreversible decree, identified with my faith itself.

I submit to you, then, that it is both right to

admit the consideration of this whole class of reasons, and also to take care that we do not impute to them a measure of certainty and conclusiveness, to which they have no right.

Now, by way of giving you an instance of what I mean, I might refer at once to cases where critical conclusions appear to us to come into collision with Scripture testimonies. For here the question at once arises, how far we have correctly apprehended the sense and design of those testimonies, and in what degree we are sure that we have done so. We are liable to mistakes, and must recognise that they are possible. The probability or improbability, in any particular case, that there is room for mistake, and that we may actually have been mistaken, varies, and the amount of it may have to be considered and reconsidered. We are apt to borrow, from Bible statements, an amount and kind of certainty on minor and subsidiary matters, which, it is demonstrable, they were not intended to give us.

But I think it more to the point to illustrate the same thing another way. For, really, the disquieting impressions often have been, and often are still, connected not so much with statements in the Bible, but with presumptions arising in our minds as to the right use of it by us, and the care exercised over it by God.

We feel that the Bible is given to us for great practical purposes. In order that it may serve those purposes we must have a certain belief about it, a certain understanding about its various parts, and about the whole. And as the Bible is so largely historical, this understanding of ours includes various historical positions or beliefs, about the connection in which the Book stands with the course of events in past ages, how the parts of it originated,—when, where, by whom, and so forth. This understanding may be called the working basis on which we proceed to use the Bible for its higher ends of enlightenment and edification. Now, anything that threatens to subvert that basis, anything that seriously unsettles it, nay, anything that needlessly disturbs it, is unwelcome; and when it goes deep, and works widely, it threatens to be dangerous. How far is this to go? This basis of a common and prevailing understanding was not arrived at without reasons. And shall we believe that God has left us to proceed all this time on serious mistakes about it? In so far as Bible facts and sayings lend themselves readily to corroborate that common understanding, or adapt themselves to it, it seems to have, directly or indirectly, Bible sanction. A presumption seems to arise, on this ground, against any proposition that disturbs, especially

that seriously disturbs, what we have rested on in so important a department.

Then, again, we have the divine care of the Bible. Here we have God's word; we have it for the enlightening and furnishing of the man of God; we have it commended to faith for the most important purposes. Are we to believe that God has not cared for its preservation in perfection, in purity? Has He left it to eyes and hands, so blind and clumsy as ours, to add to or take away from, or rearrange, what comes to us as Holy Scripture? A presumption lies against it.

The value, in argument, of presumption thus arising is, in a hundred cases, the key to misunderstandings which irritate and perplex us. One, perhaps, cannot understand how conjectures as to date and authorship of books, psalms, &c., can be hazarded on grounds which seem so slight, so precarious. Why disturb the world with such theories, when there seems so little constraining reason for propounding them at all? It is the mere restlessness and caprice of a petulant and pretentious learning. Another can just as little understand why the first should be annoyed. Why should not any light be thrown, that can be thrown, on such things as these? The point lies here: the first assumes that a strong presumption exists in favour of the

received opinion, which has so long and so generally regulated the naming and arrangement of Biblical books, as it has regulated also the thoughts of believers about them. He does not, perhaps, maintain that this opinion is matter of faith, or that its accuracy is certain; but at least he regards it as provisionally and approximately true, and also as providentially venerable. It ought not to be meddled with except for the most obvious and constraining reasons. Modified, where it is demonstrably wrong, it is to remain in strength and honour. The second, again, having observed that such opinions in some cases mislead us, has simply ceased to regard them as of any weight at all, except as weight accrues to them from independent proof. He conceives them to be not at all reliable, and not at all venerable; and he cannot represent to himself that they continue to retain an important place in any thoughtful mind. Those who go so far as this, on the critical side, surely go too far. But I suppose it is certain that those who have not been conversant with critical questions, generally rate too high the value of the class of presumptions now before us. That the Bible, as to all its great interests and uses, has not been the sport of mere accident and mistake, but has been wonderfully preserved, is a very just conviction,

and it supplies a strong presumption against any general speculative theory that proposes fanciful readjustments. When, however, this consideration is applied in argument in particular cases, and weighed against evidence, the probabilities which it supplies are by no means very strong. At all events, what should fairly be presumed, on grounds like those referred to, has repeatedly proved to be a matter in which we are very liable to mistake.

A presumption of this kind biassed the argument, for example, about the divine authority for the Hebrew points. These appear to have been gradually attached to the Hebrew letters a good while after the Christian era, in order to keep up the tradition of the right vocalisation and pronunciation; but at one time it was maintained that they had been original parts of the original records. A like presumption biassed the argument as to the way of dealing with the question of various readings. A like presumption biassed the argument about the admissibility of the use of ancient versions as evidence for altering or settling the text. For, as the existing Hebrew MSS. exhibit a considerable similarity to one another, it was considered that this should be thankfully accepted as God's good providence, preserving to us in remarkable purity the "Hebrew verity," and that ancient

versions, where they varied, should uniformly be presumed to be corrupt. But similar presumptions are still powerfully operative, derived, I repeat, partly from an uneasiness about disturbing the working basis on which our use of the Bible at present rests; but still more from an impression that the divine care over the Bible is virtually annulled, unless our impressions of the way in which it has been, and ought to have been, exercised are maintained. This applies, for instance, to the whole subject of what I may call traditional beliefs about the books of Scripture; those beliefs, that is, which have long and generally prevailed — especially when they have been embodied in titles and headings of books, and parts of books, in the ancient manuscripts. When there is no higher authority than this, it is not, and it cannot be, an article of faith to maintain these views. In many cases, certainly, it may be the dictate of good sense, and of a fair survey of the whole case, to do so. And then to forsake them will be mischievous, for you cannot forsake good sense without paying for it. It is not likely that tradition, in cases of this kind, has been generally wrong. Nevertheless, the worth of the presumption in individual cases is by no means overwhelming. Very much the same considerations apply to questions about the

unity of books—whether, as we now have it, this book or that is a single original work, or a collocation of more than one. The suggestion is unwelcome. What sort of processes and experiences are these through which the books of God's Bible are supposed to have passed? Moreover, as we think of it, the Bible seems to threaten to fall into fragments; and its whole history and its present state threaten to become suggestive of chance and haphazard, instead of the certainty, and the definiteness, and the persistent peculiarity which we love to ascribe to it. Now, there are excellent reasons for not rushing headlong into fanciful theories of dislocation of books. But in an argument on a given case they only yield probabilities which do not go very far. For it is not ours to prescribe how God may see fit, in the co-operation of His Inspiration and His providence, to bring into their present shape the books which are written for our learning. So also with the suggestion of successive re-editings and remodellings of particular books at different dates and by different hands. If I were shaping to myself the conception of how a book of Scripture should originate, so that its origin might be congruous to its station and its office, I might imagine it crystallising, like a pure and perfect gem, in the mind of the inspired author,

and transferred, with every angle and facette perfect and unalterable, to the sacred page. I would certainly not, of myself, imagine re-editings of books like these. But I have no right to count my impression worth much against evidence, nor to endeavour to overbear evidence on the strength of it. And I should be very unwise in doing so. You have heard of discussions about the date and authorship of Deuteronomy. Now, if you exclude the idea of re-editing, I do not see how the evidence of a later date and authorship for Deuteronomy could be resisted. If any one will read Bleek on the subject (no doubt the discussion has varied some of its grounds since his time, but the reference is sufficient for my purpose), he will see how many of the arguments, adduced by Bleek for a later date, are amply accounted for by the supposition of a later editing. When those are set aside, the character of the argument alters decidedly. No doubt, difficulties remain which have not been successfully solved. And it is natural for critics, especially those who think the claim to Mosaic authorship can be otherwise explained, to try a later date and see if that will fit the book. But the expedient brings new responsibilities in its train, in the view of which it must, I think, be called a violent expedient; and the book in its

proposed new situation does not appear to be so eminently luminous, nor so free from perplexity, as to afford a very comfortable compensation in argument for the difficulties on the other side. At all events (and this is the object of my reference to the question), those who think it important to defend the Mosaic origin of the main substance of Deuteronomy, cannot exclude the idea of later editing.

In offering illustrations of some of these points I have inevitably indicated my own impression of the merits of critical questions involved. But, I assure you, I remember the profession with which I set out. I have no right to pretend to any special critical qualifications; and my opinion on many of these matters is of weight or importance only to myself.

Let this be remembered, that whenever a new line of suggestion or of questioning is opened, the tendency of a certain class of critics is to drive it to extremes, to work it to death. Believers are alarmed, and are apt to think that the only remedy against boundless extravagance, and endless uncertainty, is to shut the door. But the door cannot be shut, and in due time the danger cures itself by discussion. There was a time when, as the consequence of getting rid of the authority of the points, all sorts of novelties in the interpretation of the Old Testament were

threatened. The points are now recognised as only a useful human contrivance; but the points, and the sense they indicate, are more intelligently respected and used, and they are for the most part adhered to as they were before. So, also, it was apprehended that the various readings would make chaos of the text. But before long they were the means of establishing in men's minds a far better grounded sense of the limits, the narrow limits, of uncertainty in that matter than ever had existed. Again, what was to become of the Hebrew text if all the nameless and uncertain ancient versions were let loose on it? No one now excludes the discussion of the worth of changes, suggested by the versions; and yet every one agrees that they must be applied with extreme caution, and within well understood limits. Many a critical extravagance of the past has died and been forgotten, or is only remembered to be wondered at. So it will be, no doubt, with many a theory maintained in our own day. But yet none of us have all the truth on our own side. And God has placed us so, that round the central verities, and inmost convictions, there lies a margin that is debatable, in which we are denied the satisfaction of final and absolute certainty.

Commonly, then, these questions involve an estimate and comparison of probabilities, deriv-

ing from various quarters, and depending on many considerations. Critical conclusions are, sometimes, moral certainties; sometimes, even when far from groundless, they fall clearly short of that rank. On the other side, considerations which arise from the point of view of faith, are, sometimes, certainties of faith; but, often, they are moral probabilities, of various degrees of evidence and value. The questions which give serious trouble are those in which, for a time at any rate, it appears that real probabilities of the first class are on one side, and real probabilities of the second class are on the other. The process by which such questions are settled, when they admit of settlement, is by a gradual appreciation of the relative worth and weight of the probabilities involved, effected by discussion. This discussion is carried on by experts, and takes effect on the minds of those who are so far qualified as to be fit for jurymen. And these last are, in this department and for this purpose, the representatives of the common Christian mind.

IV.

ON THE MOTIVES, OR THE ANIMUS, IN CRITICAL QUESTIONS.

IV.

JUST as there are some critical opinions which strike the believing mind as consistent with faith, and others which seem inconsistent with it,—whatever reason there may prove to be for reserve and caution in giving effect to those impressions,—so various judgments are naturally formed of the men who take part in these inquiries, and of the dispositions which they manifest. For some may be manifest unbelievers, whose critical opinions are coherent fruits of a system which rejects the Christian revelation. Some, by whom so much is not avowed, may be suspected on reasonable grounds to be really nearly in the same position. Then, again, where deliberate and conscious unbelief—or where complete unbelief—is not imputed, a man's critical opinions, and his way of expounding and defending them, do in fact often lead to unfavourable impressions. It is thought that the student has admitted, more largely than he

is himself aware, the influence of principles which grow from unbelief, or that lead to it. Or, again, it is thought that recklessness in speculation, and affectation of singularity, have led him to maintain opinions that are unsafe, and that would not find acceptance in a thoroughly sound and reverent mind. It is quite likely that such suspicions are often well grounded. Men do often yield, in particular cases, to the influence of principles, which, if full effect were given to them, would demand a far more serious tribute; which, if they come to be developed, will exact that tribute to the last farthing. And men are often induced by eccentricity, or egotism, to hazard speculations which unsettle faith, without bringing any solid contribution to knowledge. Then there are men who are believed to be safe and satisfactory, in sympathy with sound principles. Of these, some are thoroughly learned and independent men, whose position arises from no inward slavery, but expresses the genuine conviction of their minds.

Well, now, amid all these parties, and all these impressions about parties, I ask you to agree, in the first place, that it is well that believing men should take in hand this business of criticism, and devote to it that enormous labour and learning which the successful prose-

cution of it implies. I have rapidly indicated the valid function of criticism in reference to the Scriptures, and tried to describe that peculiar weighing of probabilities which makes so much both of the duty and the difficulty in these matters. I ask you, then, to agree that this work should not be left wholly to unbelievers, but that it should be taken in hand by believing men; and that this should be reputed a very honourable and worthy department of service about the Scriptures, deserving of special recognition from those who cannot be eminent in it themselves.

Now, if that is settled, I ask you to agree with me, in the second place, as to the principles upon which the critic ought to go about his work. Criticism, you will remember, is, in effect, a discussion of the value of facts, as bearing on questions that, one way or another, are historical—pertain to the field of history. Well, now, how is the believing critic to conceive his work?

Here, as in many other departments, a temptation assails the Christian workman. It equally assails and prevails with those upon the unbelieving side; but their failure in this respect concerns us less. The Christian student has a strong and well-grounded persuasion of the truth of Christianity, and of the divine origin

and authority of the Scriptures. His persuasion is the combined effect of many conspiring evidences. It follows, then, that in his working out of particular questions of fact, and particular processes of reasoning, he thinks himself entitled to expect and to demand a result favourable to his great conclusion; and this determines what he sees, what he dwells upon, what he makes much of in his discussion. Now I do not complain of this in certain kinds of work. When the professed object is to exhibit the whole argument for Christianity, or a particular section of it, a process of this kind, within certain limits, is looked for, and is justified. The other side will plead, in like manner, whatever seems capable of being fairly said on their side of the question. But it is not in place, when the professed object is to work out a particular section of evidence as to matters of fact; no, nor yet when the object is to work out the precise results, or conclusions, due to a given principle. The point, then, is to be as much as possible judicial, and to give the thing as it is, without regard to consequences. The consequences may be reckoned with afterwards as a separate affair. Let us not pretend to be more sure on any critical question than we have a right to be. Let us not refuse to see apparent critical probabilities, or, if there be such, critical certain-

ties, which are inconvenient for the completeness and comfort of the Christian argument. For it is in this way only that, in the end, exaggerations will sink to their proper level again, and disputes about fact will be brought, as near as human conditions admit of it, to their proper limits. And it is in this way only that we can feel ourselves, at last, in calm and sure possession of that actual basis of historical fact, in connection with which it pleased God that His revealing energy should go forth, and His revelation itself rise into view; in connection with which, best of all, we shall see that revelation display its own intrinsic and conclusive evidence. An incisive surveyor of our age has said, that it is the old hereditary sin of theologians, when they are setting themselves right on the side of philosophy, to go only half way through with the philosophical principles they take up. As long as these serve the purpose, they are professedly advocated, applied, and carried out. But when they threaten to become inconvenient, they are quietly allowed to drop again. There is some truth in this; although, until the philosophers have furnished us with one coherent system of philosophy that a sober-minded man can believe in, there is a good deal to be said in palliation of the offence of the divines. But a similar remark may be made of criticism. We are apt

to make play with criticism as long as it helps us to the conclusions we want, and then practically piece the argument out with orthodoxy. This only suggests doubt and suspicion to the more thoughtful part of mankind, and prolongs the confusion, by which scepticism gains.

It appears to me that the believing critic should be a man who deliberately resists this temptation, and is resolved judicially to consider and report the bearing of facts. He has not materials by which he can always come to certain conclusions, and he will not pretend to do so. He has to weigh and estimate probabilities, which are worth more or less. He is liable, like all men, to some subjective bias in that process, and can only contribute his share to the verdict. But he will strive to do it with absolute impartiality, even if the result, in the mean time, is to present to view difficulties on particular topics, which people in general cannot see how to solve, nay, which he cannot see how to solve himself.

For we suppose him to be a believing critic. Now, this seems to me to be one of the especial manifestations of *faith* on the part of the critic as such. Of course, as a believer, he does not, like an unbeliever, shut out the presence of the revealing God from his conception of the situations and the problems with which he has to

deal. But, besides, he should believe absolutely that the actual history of the world, as near as a man can get at it, by all possible strictness and truthfulness, will prove to be the very history that has been the scene of this wonderful interposition, and bears the marks of it.

This seems to me the especial form and exercise of faith, *in a critic.* One who goes over critical ground to gather arguments in favour of Christianity, or of a given version of its doctrines, may be doing a perfectly right and reasonable thing, if it is honestly and candidly done; and he may be a believing man, going over critical materials. But I would not call him, in any special sense, a *believing critic;* for I do not see in him that triumph of faith which is the critic's especial calling.

In saying this, I do not at all conceal from myself the dangers and troubles that arise when this is granted. Treachery might conceal itself under the mask of candour. Or, more likely, the believing critic, in the chivalry of his candour, and the exuberance of his confidence in the Christian cause, might do more than justice to the argument that seemed to create difficulties for the Christian, and make concessions, in which he generally gives away what is not his own. That is no part of his duty. "Thou shalt not countenance a poor man in his cause."

But this merely shows us that the critical ideal has its difficulties on both sides.

Nor, again, do I conceal from myself that such a labourer as I suppose, cannot really be indifferent to the ultimate relations between the conclusions or indications of criticism, and the apprehensions of faith. I neither suppose nor desire that he should. I maintain only that the prevalence of faith in him, should beget a special fairness and calmness of mind in judging what the exact and actual state of the case is, with which ultimately and in the end of the day the believing mind has to deal.

Let this, or something like it, be the conception one would form of the line of work of a believing critic. And, with this present to our minds, let us go on to examine a little further what shall be said of the operation of motives and impressions in this whole department.

For I do not know whether it would be a good thing if we could eliminate from these questions every personal element; if we could dismiss every imagination of motive, either good or bad, so that all minds should occupy themselves solely with a passionless calculus of evidence. I do not know whether that would be a good thing; but, for many reasons, I have not the least expectation of seeing it. I will, therefore, I repeat, say something of the impulses and motives which

predispose, and, so to say, set men's minds, both critics and those who form opinions about critics.

I can imagine a view of the position expressing itself in this way. The questions about the Bible are not new questions. The Bible itself has been studied for ages with a minuteness, with a perseverance, with a loving care, with a variety of methods, that never were applied to any other book. And if the results of believing study are likely to be too one-sided, then, from the days of Celsus and Porphyry the argument of unbelief has been, in various forms, maintained. Unfriendly scrutiny has done its best and worst. More particularly, since the Reformation, the study of the Bible, the critical study of it, has been going on resolutely. It will not do to say that it was left for our generation to open its eyes, and see, at last, the facts, in and about the Bible. Although the older learning was not presented just in modern fashions, it will not do to assume that it was weak or blind. On the contrary, it was in many instances prodigious, both in extent and depth. The very problems, the very difficulties, that are discussed now, both about Old Testament and New Testament, exercised the minds of our predecessors, no doubt in the way suggested by the point of view of their own generation. And, then, there was the deistical controversy, arising, as it were, to

show that, if our predecessors were not of themselves disposed to be impartial, they should at least be compelled to feel the force of all real difficulties. They had to take ground in the face of watchful opponents, and therefore could not escape reckoning with facts that were established. Those probabilities we spoke of, *have* been weighed by one generation after another. We come after all this. Now, is it reasonable for us to suppose that everything is still unsettled, or can be treated as if it were? Is it reasonable to suppose that some great discovery in this department is to burst upon the Christian mind, in virtue of which articles of rationalistic teaching shall be baptized, and adopted as Christian beliefs? Take two views of it in succession. Is it likely, in the first place, that any great discovery awaits us, with respect to the facts which a believer can be called upon to recognise as fairly proved, and as claiming now, for the first time, to be provided for, to be accounted for, in consistency with faith in the Word of God? Is it likely, in the second place, that reason should now appear to alter the old impressions as to what is really consistent with a sound and safe defence of faith and what is not? Have not these things been thought upon and discussed a long time? Is it reasonable to expect that Christian communities,

or the general Christian mind, will, or ought to, alter as to this? If not, is it not a very fair presumption that those who interpose with amended theories and new speculations, in this department, are either insidious or wanton disturbers of the faith, and deserve to be made to feel that they are so regarded? They ought themselves to be aware that a strong presumption lies against the likelihood of their having any important alteration to propose, that is also valid. And they ought, further, to be aware that on a subject so serious, it is culpable to unsettle the received Christian position mainly to show their own independence, or importance.

There is force in this pleading. Certainly all Christian minds, in our generation, ought to feel the full steadying effect of the history of earnest work on which we are now looking back. Certainly, great and sudden discoveries are not likely to be made in such a field, studied so well and so long. Further, the experience of the past, so various and prolonged, does, I think, constitute a discipline which may warrant pretty shrewd judgments as to the tendency both of men and of opinions. But those who are readiest to form such judgments are not always the best qualified to do so. And, at all events, there are reasons for caution as well as for confidence.

In the first place, it will not do to hold the process of criticism with reference to biblical questions as closed, and its office henceforth restricted to maintaining and defending the solutions, in which more or fewer biblical scholars have heretofore acquiesced. That will not do: both because, in general, the right to revise and discuss afresh probable judgments of this kind ought never to be interfered with; and also for more special and precise reasons, which I will proceed to state.

It is not true, first of all, that no fresh observation of facts, no new material of discussion, is now to be looked for. In the first place, the advances in the study of philology, and all the connected studies, are real and undeniable. They furnish means of fresh investigation, both for the Bible and for the documents which complete its historical setting. Even apart from that, new materials may be gleaned, from time to time; they are gleaned both from the field of literature, and from the bosom of this earth of ours, ever disclosing some buried treasure to shed another ray of light on the story of the past, often to corroborate, sometimes to modify, our previous impressions. But inside the Bible also, well and thoroughly as it has been studied, there may be gleanings still. No broad and glaring feature, certainly, remains to be dis-

covered; but little things may still be noted which have weight in deciding questions not altogether little. There are many fields of scientific research in which the big and broad facts are exhausted. But the microscopic ones are not exhausted, and they are such as prove the very reverse of despicable. The human eye has been intensely studied for many years; yet every year almost brings out something, and that a something not inconsiderable, that pertains to a more complete knowledge, and a more thorough explanation. So, also, in reference to the Bible, above all books, a microscopic examination, down to the last fibre of it, may be said to be in hand. In reference to this two things deserve attention. The methods of search may be made more complete and instructive; and the eye that sees may become more educated and penetrating to discern the significance and value of what is seen. Here, no doubt, you must expect great nonsense and folly to be talked from time to time. Men that use microscopes are apt to deceive themselves with false discoveries, unless they have been all the better trained, and are resolute to suspect and sift their own impressions. Many a misleading theory has been put forth based on small features of the Bible which the critic nursed into importance. Nevertheless, here there is a real field of

investigation. And, for example, the criticism of the gospels turns more and more on this resolute scrutiny of the minutest elements.

But this leads me to observe another influence, which, in regard to many questions, necessitates fresh discussion. The other day a friend happened to speak to me about one of the questions which have been stirred in the field of the Old Testament. He said to me: "In regard to that, is there really so much new material of discussion, so much known now that was not known before, demanding reconsideration?" My reply was: "There is not much new material, so far as I know. But there is an altered set of men's minds, in virtue of which there is a tendency to estimate the value of evidence on either side of the question in a different way." Now that applies to a good many of the questions that are in hand,—indeed, more or less, it applies to all of them. And you will see that in every case in which people have to estimate the value of probable evidence, and the comparative worth of several different kinds of probable evidence, this subjective predisposition must count for a great deal. I should say, for instance, that the presumption in favour of traditional views, just because they are traditional, and therefore the strength of presumption necessary to overcome

such views, counts in all minds for less than it did. So, also, the presumption—the pious presumption, as one may say—that the divine care of the Bible must have shielded its books, and parts of books, from every misleading title, every misleading collocation, counts for less. In both cases, the change comes in the wake of the perception that both kinds of presumption are known to fail in some cases, and therefore may fail in others. Hence more room is made in the minds of men for the consideration, that tradition often represents men's impressions rather than their knowledge; and that the divine care which, after the books were written, watched over them, must indeed be presumed to have been sufficient; but what precisely *was* sufficient is less absolutely settled.

Now, such a change in the prevailing set of men's minds, leading to a modification of judgment on the comparative worth of different kinds of evidence, may proceed from various causes. It may proceed from an increase of knowledge; it may proceed from more ripe and various impressions of the whole case, and of analogous cases; it may proceed from a stronger disposition to faith, or, on the other hand, it may spring from a stronger disposition to unbelief. For example, if men have become disinclined generally to recognise or admit the supernatural, that will

strongly bias the decision of many questions, and it is an unbelieving predisposition. Again, if certain kinds, or forms, or embodiments, of the supernatural come to be generally thought unlikely, as not countenanced by a just view of Scripture, that may also affect some questions; but, as a predisposition, it may either be in harmony, or not in harmony, with an enlightened faith. And if, instead of a timid and suspicious temper, that clung to every received opinion, lest all should be swept away, there comes, in any measure, a more courageous confidence in Christ, and in His care of His own church and faith, and in the eventual harmony of faith with all facts, even when at first sight that harmony seems precluded, that also will influence strongly the way in which mind is applied to evidence; but the predisposition it implies is full of faith, and wholly opposite to unbelief.

But the clearest understanding of how this change may take place over long periods in the general mind, is best illustrated and understood, if you have become conscious of such change in your own mind, in the way, I mean, in which you look at questions and estimate evidence. Perhaps I may here again be allowed a piece of illustrative egotism. When I was at college, I remember examining the question

about Ecclesiastes. Moses Stuart's book was the last out then, and it maintained the Solomonic authorship. I remember that I was then distinctly on that side. I don't know that there is any great change in the available materials of argument between that date and this; there is not much, certainly, as far as my limited knowledge goes. But what I am conscious of is a change in the set of my mind towards the materials. In the first place, I find myself estimating much lower than I did then the strength of the presumption to be overcome,—that, I mean, in favour of the Solomonic authorship. I see, on principles such as those explained by Delitzsch in his Introduction to his Commentary, that it is far less certain than I used to think it that the book claims literally to have been written by Solomon. On the other hand, although I daresay arguments can still be found to explain away every separate indication of a later date, just as in the days of old, I am far less disposed to be satisfied with that kind of arguing, and far more disposed to defer to the combination of signs or symptoms which indicate for that interesting and striking book of Scripture a very late position in the canon.

Of course, changes of this kind, are by no means necessarily changes for the better.

An alteration in the set of mind, or predisposition, with which evidence is weighed, may represent sometimes a mere fashion, a mere oscillation of the pendulum. Instead of implying increased intelligence and clearer insight, it may only embody a onesided perverseness, a sort of wilful experiment, which by-and-by is dismissed and forgotten. So it was, for instance, with the criticism on Isaiah, some forty years ago perhaps, when it was the fashion to cut Isaiah into fragments ascribed to independent authors and varying dates. There are still questions about Isaiah which are discussed, both as to the critical evidence and as to the bearing on belief, especially the question as to the date and authorship of the latter portion. But, certainly, the fragment view, as then maintained, has gone away into the past, and is not likely to return.

That may be the case. But, on the whole, on the larger scale, the change ought to represent progress; and generally it does. It does so always where there is diligent investigation, free discussion, and honesty of purpose. Each fact observed, each argument sifted and weighed, each aspect of things imprinted on the mind, makes an impression and teaches a lesson. As familiarity with the whole discussion grows, singularities and audacities fall back from the

prominence they once assumed, and cease to influence the situation. There is a sifting office which is fulfilled by time, and by the concourse and succession of minds; and things become probable, or become proved, to a later generation which were eyed questioningly and hesitatingly by an earlier. This is a process which will certainly not solve all problems; for there are problems on which we never shall have evidence, or on which the evidence will never be other than balanced. It is not a rapid process, or one that alights suddenly on great discoveries; rather (setting aside the case of quite fresh materials providentially turning up), it is commonly secular and slow. Yet it is not quite even and regular; rather, it goes by steps. There is a period of motion, and then one of rest. A quiet, unconscious incubation takes place; a habit or attitude of mind, suggested by the point last reached, forms itself silently and slowly. Then, almost with surprise, men become conscious that they are looking at some things with new eyes, and that on some questions they are taking up fresh ground.

And so there always have been fresh adjustments going on with reference to all biblical questions. Shall I give you a very old specimen, but bearing on a subject of discussion, as fresh now as it was eighteen hundred years ago?

It is an article of the Christian faith that the Old Testament prophesied of the good things which the New Testament brings and unveils. The coming of the Lord Jesus, and His redemption, and the gift of the Spirit, are the fulfilment of the promise which God made of old unto the fathers. Christ declared in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. This connection was maintained from the first; and it will be maintained as long as there are Christians in the world. But the precise way in which, and principles on which, this relation of the Old Testament to the New is to be evinced and expounded, and the passages which should be judged fitted to prove it, are matters on which there has been both conflict and variation of opinion. For there are difficulties about it, arising, I suppose, from our attaining but very partially to the point of view of the great Revealer, and mastering but very imperfectly His conception of the right training of men for good things to come. Now, because this is a point which is dear to the Christian heart, every form in which the Christian represents to himself the Gospel in the Old Testament is dear too; and the Christian is apt to think that to question the form in which he does it, is insidiously to try to rob him of this faith itself. And, indeed, the attempt to rob us of this faith

is always going on. But it is a faith that has all along been maintained; and yet men's thoughts have decidedly varied as to the truest, fullest, and most convincing way of understanding the relation of the Old Testament to Christ and Christian truth.

This question was as lively in the earliest centuries as ever it has been since. For there are difficulties and singularities about the Old Testament, seen in the light of the New, which were very freshly felt at that time. The Jew maintained that Christianity was a false claimant; that the Old Testament, the oracles of God, repudiated the Gospel and the crucified One. The Pagans, when they saw fit to pay enough attention to the subject, found no difficulty in agreeing so far with the Jew. The Gnostic, who was a kind of Christian, said, plump and plain, that the Old Testament was the revelation of a different God; but that the Supreme God, being much wiser and better than he, had made use of anything good in the Old Testament to introduce at last the revelation of truth and grace by the Redeemer, in a manner quite cross to the intention of the Old Testament God himself. The Christians, truly so-called, over against all these, maintained in substance what we maintain now. But many of the ways in which they brought out and

vindicated this faith of theirs are now quite strange to us. I cannot attempt to illustrate these in any sufficient way; but I will break off one little fragment, and show it to you as a specimen.

There is a passage in the fourth chapter of the Book of Lamentations which you may remember to have read: "The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the Lord, was taken in their pits, of whom we said, Under his shadow shall we live among the nations." The prophet is speaking of those who had overthrown Jerusalem, "persecutors swifter than eagles," who "pursued us upon the mountains, laid wait for us in the wilderness." The verse first quoted, read in this connection, naturally calls up to our minds the thought of Josiah or Zedekiah, or, at any rate, of some king of Judah about that time, in whose catastrophe the afflicted people saw the completeness of the general overthrow. But now, so it happens, that in the Alexandrian version, *i. e.*, the Greek translation generally used in the early church, this passage read, and still reads, "The Spirit [or breathing] of our countenance, Christ the Lord, was taken in their destructions [or, as it may mean, in their corruptions], of whom we said, Under his shadow," &c.

Another rendering of the same text, preserved by Justin Martyr, was, "The Spirit that is *before* our face, Christ the Lord," &c. In like manner, or, rather, with still further modification, the old Latin translation read, "The Spirit of our face, Christ the Lord, was taken *in our sins*, to whom we said, In thy shadow," &c.; and so it reads still in the Vulgate, the authoritative version of the Church of Rome. You see, the points on which the variations turn are these,—in each of the three languages, Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, one word is used to express both *spirit* and *breath;* but when the Hebrew word for *nostrils* was translated *face*, or *countenance* (as without violence it might be), then "breath," the lower meaning, seemed to have no special appropriateness, and the higher meaning, "spirit," might be thought preferable: and that is plainly intended in the Greek and Latin versions. "The anointed of the Lord," *i.e.*, of Jehovah, is the translation of the Hebrew, as now printed in our Bible, no doubt correctly. But in the days when points were not, it was possible to read, "One anointed, Jehovah;" or, as Jehovah was, for reverence, usually not pronounced, "One anointed, the Lord." One does not, indeed, see why, or how, Jews, translating into Greek before the Christian era, should have missed the correct reading, which was surely

more obvious and easy, and stumbled on this one. But it appears they did so. The word which we render *pits* was translated *destructions*, which was of no material consequence. But as the Greek word was capable of meaning *corruptions*, as well as *destructions*, the Latin version rendered it *sins*, and has adjusted the sense to mean, "taken in *our* sins," rather than "in *their* sins." The verse is, indeed, singularly liable to equivocation, for the word *taken*, in the Greek, was capable of two other distinct meanings—*conceive*, in both senses of that English word—which can be allusively referred to in the effort to bring all possible meanings out of the text.

Now, it will be seen that the passage, as it appeared in the Greek and Latin versions (rather more in the Latin), appeared to be a remarkable Messianic testimony. The Christians found the passage so translated. If the translation stood, it could hardly but be applied to the Messiah, abrupt and unconnected as the allusion might be. The Christians were in no condition to appeal to the Hebrew original; but if they had been, it was not impossible to maintain a fight for the Septuagint translation, upon the unpointed Hebrew text; the only absolutely decisive argument for that which our Bibles receive, being just that it is a great deal more natural, though not, at

first sight, so edifying. All that being so, the Christians took and pleaded this passage as a Messianic testimony to the divine Messiah, crushed in the calamities, or in the sins, of His people. Some (one at least) acknowledge a primary reference to Josiah, as the link of connection by which the prophetic mind moves over to the Messianic region. More commonly the words are simply adduced as evincing their own direct Messianic sense. This appears almost as soon as it could appear, viz., in Justin Martyr (Apol. i.). Then we have it in Irenæus, in Tertullian (who, by-the-bye, has a reading of his own), in Origen (who finds some mysteries in it of a very special kind), in Theodoret, in Augustine, and no doubt in many more. The words of Theodoret, a very respectable and sensible interpreter, may be worth quoting: "Let the Jews tell us what 'Christ' this is of whom the prophetic word speaks. Who of these, who, among them, are called anointed, king, or prophet, or priest, is ever called Lord?[1] But they have no instance to show, however many false testimonies they employ. It is clear, then, that the prophet predicted that the Saviour and Lord should be taken by them

[1] A sound enough argument, since the Hebrew word is not Adonai, but Jehovah.

on account of the corruption of their impiety." And he presently adds: "The prophet inserted this prophecy in the Lamentations, instructing the Jews that were in those days (since He that is the Hope was not yet born) that they should obtain pardon, and have the blessing of being called back again, though they should one day deliver to the cross the Saviour of the world."

This, then, was in those days one of the passages which it was thought natural and reasonable to understand as direct prophetic witness to Christ. To have disputed it, or doubted it, would have been thought unreasonable, and might probably have been imputed to a disposition to make difficulties, to argue down the Messianic element in the divine Word, and to get rid of what was spiritual and tended to edification. Nowadays all that has simply vanished. No one argues for it any more. No one says that the present Hebrew points have been affixed by Jews, and are therefore to be suspected; no one strives to find a grammatical principle fitted to make the old interpretation acceptable. It has become simply impossible for us to believe that sense any more. It is still possible for us, on the strength of the analogy between the kingly office in Judah and the kingly office of Christ,

to remember lovingly, as we read the passage, another "Anointed of the Lord," whose dying did *not* complete His people's overthrow, but ensured their victory and redemption. That allusion we may employ when we think it profitable. But *we* make the allusion on the strength of analogies elsewhere discernible. We do not profess to find it in the text, but bring it (if we do so) to the text from another quarter.

Now, if, in the ages that have passed since then, the church of Christ has not made sure a great deal of ground, with reference to the right way of understanding or expounding the promise of the Old Testament, in its relation to the fulfilment in the New, I should count that a sad thing indeed. But I should not count it a sad thing to be told that, still, some ways of understanding and illustrating the connection, which seem to us reasonable, and which we would not lightly let go, shall one day give place to others, profounder, more comprehensive, and more divine. I trust it may be so. I feel sure it will.

But something is to be said still more specifically. What has been said may apply to any age. But what follows applies with a special emphasis to ours.

I have spoken, in another connection, of this

as a characteristic of our age, that it is signalised by a very earnest effort after complete and correct conception of the historical life of the race in all its aspects; an effort carried out by the application of every possible resource. Now that effort implies a state of mind which will certainly apply itself to all the great critical problems, and, therefore, to the biblical ones, with points of view and preparations not the same as those of any former age. And believers who join in the process, must join in it with a full sympathy in all that is real and valid in this fresh impulse, this fresh preparation and tension of the studious mind. I only mention this, and pass from it. But I must not quite so briefly pass from another remark which this part of the subject requires. It is this. I had occasion to allude in an earlier part of this Lecture to the intense and minute study of Scripture, in the application certainly of extraordinary learning and diligence, which has taken place especially since the Reformation; and I spoke also of the controversies, especially the deistical, which brought about a sifting of the grounds on either side. No one who knows even a little of the kind of work done in those days, will be disposed to undervalue it. But, perhaps, it may be correctly said, that, on both sides, the details were investigated to a

large extent under the influence of a desire to find the best tenable ground on which to exhibit the defence of a general system. On the one side, the object was to present, as reasonably and strongly as could be done, the defence of Christianity, and to bring out all in favour of it which the facts could fairly yield; on the other side, the object was to discredit Christianity, as a religion supernaturally revealed, and to bring out everything that seemed to impeach its character and grounds in that relation, and to bring out a complete view of the world's history, discharged of the supernatural. Men could be named, indeed, to whom neither side of this description was applicable, who were more disposed to look at each detail on its own merits. But, out of sympathy in that respect with the general spirit of their time, they rather threw out views on such questions, than elaborately grounded them by investigation. On the whole, the critical details were contemplated, as they lent themselves to be taken up into the system, to which, on general grounds, or as the result of his whole thinking, the writer gave his faith; and, naturally, he placed them in the most favourable relation to that, of which, as it appeared to him, they fairly admitted. Now, this way of looking at the case and arguing it has certainly not disappeared. I should rather say,

it continues to exist in its intensest forms, and is exemplified all round the compass. But, still, the disposition to take another course has gained ground, and has made an important place for itself. I mean the disposition to investigate each question on its own merits; to dismiss, in the mean time at least, the reference to possible advantages or possible embarrassments that may attend the decision of it; to ascertain what the indication is which is yielded by the critical evidence, looked at simply as a question for judicial determination; and to announce the result, be its worth or its bearing on other questions what it will. Its worth will depend on the degree of the probability or presumption which the evidence affords; and, certainly, I think those who pursue this method sometimes err, by ascribing to their conclusions a degree of certainty or finality which they do not possess. For it may be of great importance that we should discuss and settle what the probable verdict in a critical question is, by the critical evidence alone; and yet if, that critical evidence is able to yield only a moderate probability in favour of any conclusion, it is a mistake in logic to take that result afterwards as a certainty. Still, it is a very good thing that the tendency is establishing itself, both among believers and among those who unhappily are not

such, to work out the critical problems on the principle I have stated. For it is the only principle by which progress can be made towards the clearest possible exhibition of what is knowable and provable in the whole case.

Hence, amid all the partisanships which reveal themselves in these discussions, an increasing number of men, I hope, are applying themselves to see the utmost that can be made of critical questions, on their own proper grounds, and in the application of the principles proper to such inquiries. It is easy to cherish exaggerated expectations in a matter of this kind. What I have said in a former Lecture of the nature and conditions of critical inquiry, and the amount and kind of evidence afforded, may show that complete demonstration and complete agreement are not likely often to occur. As I look on, which is all that falls to me, I seem to see precisely what we might expect in enterprises like these. There may be unconscious bias, when there is the intention to renounce all bias. There may be good will, when there is not good sense; and in all matters where probable evidence has to be appreciated, good sense tells beyond all computation on the prospects of success. There may be an adventurousness of mind, for which novelty and audacity have a perverting attraction. There

may be also honesty, learning, good faith, and sound judgment. But, however workmen may vary, this is the line of work which will best serve the church, and the cause of God, in the end. I think it is increasing. I think there is a growing number of men who aim at least at what I described as the point of honour of the believing critic.

And I wish there were a more general recognition, in some quarters, of the peculiar kind of enthusiasm which animates many workers on this line. It is the enthusiasm of an intense faith in the truth of Christianity, in divine supernatural revelation. It is a burning confidence in this, that the strictest and most thorough historical investigation, if quite strict and thorough, will exhibit the track of a revealing God, moving down through history, in a manner that will prove irresistible; and will rise over against all the scientific certainties, so as to command the assent of men no less cogently than they do.

This enthusiasm may be sanguine, like other enthusiasms. It may not be always wise. It may play into the hands of the enemy, by concessions which do not represent what is due to truth, but rather what is suggested by a too eager confidence. Some of those to whom I ascribe it belong to schools of theology from

which I am far removed: some of them deem it honest, and according to the facts, to take up positions on critical questions, which I, endeavouring to put together the various lines of evidence, cannot share, and must oppose; which I regard as neither sound nor safe. But all that does not hinder me from recognising this enthusiasm as a thoroughly believing one, and honouring accordingly those whom it inspires.

On such grounds as these I think that those whose converse with the Bible is not mainly for critical purposes, but with a view to edification, or to doctrine, may reasonably be called upon to cherish a considerate and tolerant spirit towards this kind of critical inquiry, and recognise in it motives which are noble and Christian. There are views, and there are men, whose character, from the Christian point of view, is bad. Yet there are conclusive reasons for discrimination; and even when we feel called upon to sift or to contest critical positions, by way of guarding the interests which we especially represent, we ought to do so under a distinct consciousness that the true interests, both of edification and of sound doctrine, have not always turned out to be wisely understood by those who undertook to guard them.

But, in order to keep the peace, in the measure

in which peace may and should be kept, a corresponding duty must be fulfilled on the other side. Those who are to be owned as believing critics, as undertaking the critical department of the whole work which falls to human minds, and which may be gone about believingly—these have their own responsibility, and they must show themselves disposed to discharge it. They, also, are fallible. They, also, are apt to be carried away by an over-eager confidence in indications supplied by their own department, and by an over-eager confidence in the rounded and completed conclusions to which these indications lead them. They, also, are apt to dispose too summarily, and slightly, of considerations arising in fields of study which are not peculiarly their own. What, then, may be expected of them? Not that they should suppress or twist facts. Not that they should suppress their opinions as to the conclusions towards which the evidence seems to them to point. If they think the evidence is, in a good degree, weighty and clear, they will naturally say so. They may be wrong in their opinion, or right. But I certainly should not ask them to suppress it, if they are convinced that it is the verdict yielded by the evidence in their own department. But when the opinion is such as is likely to cause a collision with

believing conceptions about divine Revelation generally; when it cannot be received except on terms which will be felt as putting a sharp strain on faith, and, perhaps, on reason too, it seems not too much to ask that such an opinion shall be propounded, not dogmatically, but problematically. It may well be, surely, that even if the opinion proposed has ground in facts, it does not yet amount to the complete and final solution. It may be that the complete solution, when all things are considered, may carry in it elements, which may modify the critical assertion, on the one hand, and assuage the difficulties for faith and reason, on the other. But if the opinion is put forth, and pressed, as an established fact, which men are called to receive and submit to, from which, henceforth, fresh departures may be taken, all difficulties are defied; and all who feel those difficulties to be important and serious, are defied at the same time. Then war follows. If, as members of the great Christian community, we belong to one another, a measure of mutual regard, such as I now suggest, should influence, I think, not only the outward utterance of opinions, but also the inward conduct of the mind in finally adopting them. I am not for any man holding his tongue, out of mere fear of a cry of heresy. Mere fear of that is a bad and base thing. But I do not

think that the interests of truth will be prejudiced, nor yet the candour and frankness of our own minds, by recognising a certain responsibility towards that great mass of Christian view and feeling, which certainly is not all equally enlightened, but, still, has in it elements of truth and goodness, not so adequately represented in any individual mind, however pious or however able.

And is not this worthy of consideration? The absolute adoption of any opinion, prematurely, avenges itself. For, once it is absolutely adopted, it then demands to be applied. While it is in suspense, it is inactive; when finally embraced, it acts. It becomes, and must become, a stepping-stone to new conclusions, wider and deeper than itself. Now, more patient and prolonged reckoning with difficulties might have brought fresh lights and new modifications; under the influence of these, any truth that is in the theory could have been safely and accurately applied to further investigations. But a position, when hastily adopted, must be hastily applied. Then, more or less, it betrays us on to unsound ground, by-and-by to be reconsidered and abandoned, but with increased confusion in the mean time.

There is one important question which I think should be distinctly adverted to before

I close, and in some respects it may be fitly placed after the subjects already touched upon.

I have pointed out various ways in which elasticity is introduced into the discussion of the questions that have been before us. I have tried to show you how irremediable collision is averted, and room is made for mutual correction and adjustment. In illustrating this, I pointed to the fact that the impressions of faith about the Bible involve many elements to which, not certainty, but only probability (high, perhaps) can be ascribed. I instanced various presumptions, which have seemed reasonable to Christians, in connection with a book like this, and yet have proved amenable to correction. I instanced, also, the interpretations of statements in the Scriptures themselves; which may seem very well grounded from a particular point of view, but yet may prove by no means so certain or conclusive when reconsidered in altered circumstances. But no one can be acquainted with contemporary literature without coming in contact with the question, whether the facts, which criticism studies and represents, do not demand more; and whether a further concession must not be made. Are there not statements of the Bible which are to be disposed of by plainly saying that they are inaccurate, and, therefore, not trustworthy? Here it is supposed that there

is no room for doubt as to the sense of the Bible statement, as intended by its writer. It is supposed, also, that there is no room for possible explanation on the ground of corruption of the text in early times, and the like. After everything that can fairly be explained by suppositions of that kind has been set aside, it is held that there are inaccurate and mistaken statements, which are liable to correction, as evidence may furnish the materials.

This view may be extended, or restricted, in various degrees. We have the most sweeping form of it when it is maintained that the books of the Bible were written without divine assistance, and under the ordinary conditions of authorship; that, in so far as they claim to be supernatural, or report what is supernatural, they are wholly mistaken; and that, in other things, there is substantially the same mixture of the true and the legendary which we expect to meet in ancient books generally. From the point of view of these Lectures I do not think it necessary to take any notice here of opinions of this order. Nor will I contemplate the alternative proposed by another class of minds; an alternative less objectionable, indeed, but still far removed from the views which are received in our churches. They believe in divine revelation, and in Christ the Son of God; and they

look for the hope of the world to come. But they have persuaded themselves that the inspiration of the Scriptures did not impart certainty and authority to any of its statements, but rather secured for them all an element, or quality, of a different kind, what we may describe as an inward breath of spiritual force and elevation. Bible statements are, therefore, of the highest value as sources of impulse, as stimulating the sense of duty, and of sin, as suggesting and holding before us great thoughts, as opening vistas of insight into the moral and spiritual world; but yet so, that no particular statement can be assumed to be free from the influence of human infirmity; and each must abide the trial of that inward sense of truth and goodness, which the Bible itself does much to deepen and quicken in our minds. I do not advert particularly to these either. For though I do not doubt that some of them have made good their right to be considered as believing men, yet their position is too remote from our point of view, to be usefully commented on, except in connection with more minute and thorough discussion of the merits than is here attempted. But there are those who look upon the Scriptures as divinely qualified to be the authentic and authoritative revelation of God, and directory for man, who yet maintain that, in various

subordinate and incidental matters—what one has described as "unspiritual minutiæ"—God has not been pleased to preserve the writers from occasional errors. He has left them to use their own powers: therefore mistakes occasionally occur, such as men of sense and fidelity may fall into, either from inadvertence, or from want of accurate information. God, they think, has not been pleased to inspire the Bible so as to hinder this. We may wish that He had, or may feel inclined to suppose that a Bible so inspired would have been more perfect; but our duty is to thankfully accept what He has in fact provided. They think this view of the case is proved by observation; by noticing in Scripture statements of this subordinate and incidental kind, which are in point of fact inaccurate, and can be proved to be so.

I need not here rehearse what I said before regarding Bible difficulties. It is simple matter of fact that various statements in the Bible *seem* to be inaccurate, for they seem inconsistent with other Bible statements, or else with evidence, apparently trustworthy, from other quarters; or they are, in their own nature, startling and unlikely. Occurring in another book, they would be set down as certainly, or probably, inaccuracies and mistakes, such as may befall authors of general good faith and intelli-

gence ; very many of them being in matters so subordinate and unimportant, that, in another book, they would attract little attention or discussion. Occurring in the Bible, they have created a great deal of discussion. On the one hand, believers have generally felt that, looking to what the Bible says of itself, and looking to the attitude of mind towards itself which it invites, the imputation of errors, even in subordinate matters, is inadmissible. On the other hand, unbelievers have made much of these apparent errors, in order to show to believers that the Bible does not possess the qualities they ascribe to it, especially the quality of perfect trustworthiness in all matters on which it makes statements. And, then, some believing men, as I have said, have admitted the existence of errors in circumstantial details, and have maintained that this ought not to awaken surprise, or be regarded as lowering the value and sufficiency of Scripture for its proper ends. The adoption of this opinion is apt to be regarded as due to a spirit of indifference, or a tendency to rationalism; and then, as a natural consequence, it begins to be supposed that whatever arguments can be advanced for it, are arguments that will justify, at the same time, a distrustful and suspicious state of mind towards the Bible generally. Now it is quite fair to argue

that the opinion, in itself, tends to lower or impair the conception of the Bible which we ought to cherish. But I hold it of great importance, especially at present, not to misunderstand the position from which, and motives under which, the view in question is maintained—of importance, I mean, not for those who maintain it, but for ourselves. Besides, I am convinced that we can never deal successfully with any position in debate, until we understand it from the point of view of those who maintain it. Therefore, I purpose to make a few remarks, with a view to show you how I understand the position and argument of the party now before us.

The main ground they take is just this,—honesty appears to them to require the acknowledgment of such minor inaccuracies as matters of fact. They think the explanations given of the various apparent discrepancies are too strained and far-fetched to be credible in themselves, or creditable to the cause that requires them. Therefore they refuse to resort to these expedients. And they have, of course, persuaded themselves that the existence of such things is not inconsistent with the character God ascribes to the Bible, nor yet with the benefit it should confer on us.

That is the main ground they take. But you will hardly understand the state of mind with

which we have here to deal, unless you look a little further afield.

In the first place, they think that an advantage in argument, alike undesirable and undue, is given to the unbeliever by undertaking the vindication of every detail in a book like the Bible. It is clear that in the Bible pains have not been taken to exclude the *appearance* of inconsistency and inaccuracy. And they think it an unwise and groundless thing to concede that unbelievers can greatly damage the Bible, or the faith of Christians, if they make out some of those apparent inaccuracies to be real, especially those which are in themselves of little or no importance. They think this plays into the hands of unbelievers; nurses in the minds of believers an unworthy anxiety on small points; and withdraws their minds, so far, from the central positions, in which the commanding strength of Christianity comes out irresistibly.

So they think. And they are so far right, that no Christian ought to allow his faith in Christianity to be entangled in those small points, or to be at the mercy of the argument about them. Christianity stands, whether inaccuracies have been allowed to gather round the fringes of it or not. Every writer on the evidences argues that. But we should not look

on this as a mere piece of fence, in the setting forth of the evidences. It represents a great conviction, that ought to be lodged in all our minds.

I go further, however. I have said that our faith in *Christianity* should not be allowed to be entangled in these small points: I add, nor our mode of view and feeling about the *Bible*, either. Our main persuasion about the Bible should be the persuasion of its fitness to instruct us in the truth of God, about all the momentous matters on which He deals with us. There is, of course, a right way and a wrong, of conceiving how the minor statements of the Bible are influenced by the inspiring spirit, which makes the Book what it is; and there is an importance, in its own place, in stating that rightly. But yet, *in comparison with the conviction you entertain about the main office and message of the Bible*, you should, as you reasonably may, habitually cherish the feeling, that the questions about these small matters are thoroughly despicable; that you are not going to allow them to trouble you; that, whether a given miracle was wrought, as one Evangelist seems to say, at the east end of Jericho, or, as another, at the west end, or whether there is any explanation of their statements or none, is a question which, if it should never be settled in this world, nor yet to all eternity, you reckon

of the very smallest importance, or rather, practically, of no importance at all. What the explanation of it may be, you may neither know nor care. And you may refuse to allow the evident office of the Bible, for your heart and mind, to be prejudiced by any speculation about it.

That leads me to remark, in the next place, that those, whose view I am referring to, have to argue critical questions on critical grounds. Now, in arguing critical questions, you must constantly take the argument on the supposition that these apparent contradictions or inaccuracies, or many of them, are real. That is quite inevitable. Every one must provisionally take it so, even if afterwards he should proceed, at a more advanced stage, to argue that these appearances are capable of satisfactory explanation. But, then, beginning at the point I have suggested, and on the supposition of real discrepancies, the critic may satisfy himself that the Divine authority of the Bible can be adequately maintained. If so, why not abide there? At all events, he identifies his mind and argument so thoroughly with the supposition on which he set out, that afterwards it appears to him unnatural and artificial to move on to another.

But, in the third place, you must observe

this, that for those who are building up the historical argument, discrepancies, real but minor discrepancies, may not only be borne with, but they are of very great value in argument; and, therefore, it is not so wonderful that you find a class of students of the Bible who are really unwilling to explain them all away.

The value of them is of this kind. Discrepancies belong to the realities of human historical literature. They give a peculiar verisimilitude to documents that are really historical, and they have a recognised value as evidence. In building up the historical argument, great strength arises by being able to cite independent witnesses. Now, among the proofs that one narrative is independent of another, discrepancies between them in minor things holds a place. The agreement in the main is proved to be valuable and remarkable, because the narratives, giving the story independently, differ in some minor matters. So, for instance, in the case I spoke of, Luke is relating that occurrence at Jericho, so far, independently of Matthew and Mark. But, in some circumstances, the existence of these discrepancies has quite a peculiar power to establish the particular kind and degree of independence you want; and they are valued accordingly. I think it would not be too bold to say this. The

narrative in the Pentateuch is, no doubt, sufficient for its intended purposes; no further evidence or information has been supplied to us, because, we may presume, it is best on the whole, it should not be. But any one can see that for the purpose of building up the historical argument, and establishing the credibility of the main events of that early history, a parallel narrative, such as those we have for other periods, might be invaluable. Now its value would depend on its being demonstrably independent. And it would be far from difficult to suggest minor discrepancies, which would not only demonstrate the mutual independence, but which might, at the same time, fix the age of both narratives to be near that of the events related, and so indefinitely enhance their demonstrable value. So valuable may discrepancies be for critical purposes.

It is true, nearly or altogether the same service is performed by the strong appearance of discrepancy, such as we find in parallel Bible narratives, even if, at bottom, the discrepancy is not real. But yet, you can understand that, in the line of thought and of argument to which I have adverted, it may seem an unreal and artificial thing always to resort to that explanation. You can understand that men, looking from this point of view, may hold

it more worthy of God to have permitted ordinary features of genuine historical narrative, *i.e.*, minor inaccuracies, to appear and hold their place, rather than to have solicitously averted the thing, while the appearance remained.

It is in this way I understand the motives under the influence of which this opinion is held, and the decision with which it is expressed. And certainly, I, for one, regard many of those who have taken this line, with no feelings but those of confidence, as well as gratitude for important services rendered to the church of Christ. They do seem to me to involve themselves in more difficulty than they are aware of, with reference to the theoretic explanation of the confidence they continue to repose in the Scriptures. But, on every point on which Scripture was intended to convey to us confident assurance, they appear to receive its teaching with entire submission. The position they have taken up is one which could hardly have been left unoccupied without risk to serious interests ; it is one of the relative necessities of the present stage of discussion. And, for my part, to name the example which occurs to me at the moment of writing, such pieces of thorough and honest work as those of Dr. Sanday upon the Gospels, which could only

have been produced from some such point of view, I regard as of very great value.

Yet I will express my hope that, by-and-by, when the dust of present discussions is laid, opinion will begin to move back towards the view which, no doubt, has always been the prevalent one in the church. It may seem, indeed, that it cannot be of much consequence to hold, that we have, in the Bible, infallibly true statements about points which are very small, or subsidiary; especially when, confessedly, those statements are, at all events, not clear enough to make us sure how the fact was. But, really, we have no anxiety about those statements. What we care about is, the principle adopted in regard to them, and made generally applicable. It seems a fair way of understanding the commendation given to an utterance or a writing, when offered to our faith, to suppose that, in the sense intended by the author or authors, its statements are, throughout, trustworthy. Such a general character seems to me to be claimed for the Bible, partly in the texts commonly quoted for its inspiration, but much more forcibly and persuasively in the claim for simple and direct confidence which it seems everywhere to make; and in the ready and unreserved reliance which is manifested by those whom we find referring to the Scriptures,

in the Scripture page itself. This reliance seems to be, at all times, congenial to the Christian mind. It is not that we pretend to be sure about everything of which the Bible speaks. On many of those things we never shall be sure. It is demonstrable that, on many, it was never intended that we should be sure; for the statements have not been made clear. Nor is it that we impute to the language of Scripture a painful anxiety and scrupulosity. On the contrary, the sense of Scripture, whatever it is, is expressed with the utmost freedom, and often with what, in another book, one would call careless breadth and force. But it does seem a tenable line, and a very biblical one, to say that, in our use of the Scriptures, it is not a part of our duty to suspect their accuracy; while we have the freest leave, and constant occasion, to suspect our own understanding of them, and the manner in which we are using them.

I think this way of looking at it is clear enough, and strongly enough grounded, to bear the weight of some apparent difficulties. I acknowledge, at the same time, that it might be refuted by facts, with the effect of proving that I, and many others, are wrong in the precise way in which we understand the claim of the Scriptures for confidence and deference. But I think it is a remarkable thing that bib-

lical difficulties should generally have proved susceptible of some tolerable explanation. In themselves, and for their own sake, it may matter very little whether they are explained or not. But the possibility, generally speaking, of suggesting some tolerable explanation is remarkable. If writers of the period to which the Bible belongs had been really and wholly left to themselves in the historical details, could there have failed to occur great quantities of hopeless and insoluble errors? We do not infer that the Lord of the church must be thought to elevate into importance, as matters for oracular decision, things in their own nature trifling, while leaving many other things in the uncertainty of vague and popular speech. But we do not think it impossible that He may have guarded the comfort of His people in the use of the Scriptures, by averting the occurrence, in the Scriptures, of such demonstrable phenomena, as should constitute it into a duty for them to consider how far they should suspect the veracity of what they read.

Gentlemen, I have tried to present some general considerations as to the conditions under which criticism applies itself to the Bible; as to the manner in which faith is related to those critical operations; and as to the way in which the situation thus created is to be contemplated.

They could only be general considerations. Therefore they cannot carry you far in making up your minds on specific questions. But they will have served their purpose if they enable you to bring to any subjects of this kind which come across you in your reading a fuller acquaintance with the general lie of the land; and if they help you to decide how far it is necessary for you to take up a position for yourselves, provisional or final, on the questions thus presented to you.

But, in closing, I may be allowed to remind you that the great thing is the understanding of the Bible from within, by the lights struck out between its message and your own heart and conscience, when the Spirit of God is leading you into its truths. That is, beyond comparison, the great thing for us all. Criticism deals especially with the human or natural side of Scripture—the medium which the revealing Word animates and informs. That is a good office; but it requires to be balanced by something else. The more that history and criticism ply their busy engines, we need, upon the other side, a more inward meditative appreciation and appropriation of the very kernel of the Scriptures; and we reach this only through the Door — Christ, as we give ourselves up, wholly and for life, to be—not in theory, only,

but in practice too—disciples of the Eternal Word of God. There has been a large measure of this in some former times; we need it now. It must be sought: not by going back, in an imitative way, to old-fashioned methods, but in the use of the present along with the past; taking with us all present helps; starting from the present experience of the race and of ourselves. We need this—you need it But, also, in a sense, the Bible needs it; that is to say, the Bible cannot be maintained in its due place and influence without it. This will bring out new evidences against any new sources and forms of doubt. This will prepare wise and loving eyes to penetrate through the confusions that get up, between critics—unbelievers, many of them, that see nothing but the letter—and the orthodox—unbelievers many of them too, that also see nothing but the letter on their own side. It will prepare strong hands to lift the undying Word of God out of those miserable contentions, and strong voices to utter its main message, deep and true, in the fresh accents of each succeeding generation. Think of this, gentlemen. Life may bring you to a time when you get weary enough of such a subject as "the Bible and Criticism," and of the questions it stirs. But it shall be well if, at the same time, there is ever growing on you the conviction that

the message and teaching of the Scriptures are still fresh, still refreshing. "I have seen an end of all perfection: but thy commandment is exceeding broad."

APPENDIX.

APPENDIX.

A, p. 27.

IN page 27 reference is made to the value of tradition in critical inquiries. The instance may supply an illustration of the variety of conditions under which criticism may have to work, and the practical circumspection with which its rules must be applied. As the Lecture states, mere tradition is distrusted. Indeed, it has been inculcated with great force that tradition is always to be disregarded, unless it passes into the form of written evidence—put in writing not far from the time at which an event is alleged to have happened; that without that security, you have no adequate foundation to build upon. The tradition *may* be true, or have truth in it; but you can never be even approximately sure. Sir George Cornewall Lewis wrote a very interesting book to illustrate and inculcate these principles. Yet tradition, in certain circumstances, and dealing with certain kinds of material, may hand down with wonderful accuracy, for a long time, the burden with which it is charged. And there may sometimes be proof that, in point of fact, it has done so. For instance, suppose you have two lines of tradition of the same event, or the same man, coming down through different races, in different countries, and so formed as to

justify the belief that they are really independent. That, I think, may fairly be asserted of some traditions handed down by the Norse Sagas on the one side, and by the Irish traditions on the other. They were committed to writing, very possibly, ages after the traditions began to run. But the concurrence of the two separate lines, where it is clear and definite, yields a very high degree of evidence to the particular point of agreement; and, besides, it does something to furnish an impression of the degree in which those traditions *could* keep accurate hold of certain classes of events.

B, p. 71.

What is here said of the Scripture manner or style, in its historical references, is really only one aspect or department of the manner of Scripture speech generally. In the Lecture, as originally written, this was pointed out; but, to do the subject any justice, it would require disproportionate amplitude of treatment. I have, therefore, omitted it from the text. I preserve a reference to it, in this form, for the following reason. What I have said in the Lecture might be objected to, from the point of view of a low theory of inspiration, or an absolute denial of it. It might be said that the Lecture merely tries to dress up in fine phrases the fact (as it might be alleged to be) that the Bible, so far as it reports history, is an inaccurate book; or that many portions of it, at least, deserve that character. The answer to this would be to show that its method of language is consistent throughout, in reference to those matters on which the writers must be held to have been most intent; and that it is this method which secures the highest ends of the Bible, in the teaching of men and the training of believers, and so belongs to its perfection. If that is generally true, then, in equity, it becomes reasonable to take the benefit of this mode of explanation, wherever it fairly applies.

C, p. 125.

The office of criticism is very much determined, and its vitality maintained, by *negation*,—by taking leave to doubt, and then trying the question whether the doubt can be maintained. There is in the world much historical assertion about books and other things. "But," says Criticism, "is it so? Let us see." If she can bring nothing against it, things are as they were. If she can bring against, let us say, a book's date or authorship, prevailing doubts, then the book is dislodged from the historical place to which it was assigned before. Yet the book must have originated at some time and through some one; so that When? and By whom? are the next questions. Having *dis*-lodged it, can we *re*-lodge it? Criticism succeeds in doing so, speaking generally, only when extensive and minute historical information is accessible. By helps thus supplied, the works of Dionysius, referred to in the Lecture, are fixed down to the fifth century, and to a particular branch of a particular Christian sect; and the Isidorian decretals are referred very nearly to their birthday in one decennium of the ninth century, and very nearly to their birthplace in the ecclesiastical province of Mainz.

Still, criticism, when it remodels the received belief of men, is nore powerful in the negative than in the positive direction. For example, it *dis*-lodges more books than it is able to *re*-lodge anywhere, except within pretty wide limits of date and origin. And the absence of collateral materials, of external testimonies, references, and subjects of comparison, tells more severely on its positive than on its negative capacities. There are books which appear with the name of such and such an author (Athenagoras on the Resurrection, for example), of which criticism has little to say but this, that it finds nothing against the claims of the book, or against common opinion about it. That justifies a very strong positive opinion in

favour of the book, if the period to which it is ascribed is well furnished with crosslights and means of comparison; for, in those circumstances, a spurious book could hardly have come off so well. But if the period is one for which no such advantages exist, the mere fact that criticism finds no positive ground of rejection would not amount to a strong presumption. It might indicate, rather, that the ignorance was too great to justify any conclusion.

The application of all this, which I venture to suggest, is this: When criticism takes a book in hand, claiming an early date, for which contemporary literature fails, the instinct of criticism is to look for signs of a later date and origin. If such signs, real and conclusive, are found, the question is ended. If only signs suggestive of some degree of doubt appear, then, among other reasons for suspense of judgment is this, that the possible counter-evidence, if it ever existed, is far more thoroughly removed beyond the reach of criticism. Criticism notes what strikes it, and stumbles it. Where all goes smoothly, no argument of any kind can be made to grip. The congruities and agreements by which the book's relation to contemporary doing and thinking might once have been made to appear, have fallen silent. The means no longer exist by which their significance could be discerned and exhibited.

This is not a consideration which is allowed much weight in ordinary criticism. For it is natural to say,—"We can ascribe to the book no higher age than can be established by evidence; on any conjectural earlier date, to which, in spite of some indications, it *may* conceivably belong, nothing can be built. Nothing can be made of conceivable evidence, which, at the same time, is acknowledged to have vanished from view." But while this is true in cases where nothing but ordinary critical evidence is in question, yet when evidences or presumptions of another kind come into account, the considerations now

dwelt upon acquire weight, as bearing on the *relative* value of the critical indications. Compare D, *infra*.

D, p. 137.

The following is a specimen, rather than a statement, of the ground on which the obligation to reckon with the general Christian mind is maintained to be a wholesome necessity for criticism. The tendency of critics, as such, is to do all they fairly can with natural forces, and with ordinary principles of investigation. They try to account for their phenomena by reasoning in that line. Most critics are of opinion that the Christian mind has resorted too freely to the idea of direct miraculous divine interposition, and has underrated the degree in which ordinary laws of mind and literature have been allowed to operate in the composition of the Scriptures. Therefore they often follow out the tendency above described with all the emphasis of recoil; as doing justice to the right way of it, and escaping from the wrong.

However, the believing critic recognises some where, or in some form, a divine presence and operation which gives the Bible its peculiarity. This is an operative cause which must be taken into account so far as it operated. But, then, the effects of it—the proofs of it—are not always presented to the critical eye, in such facts and phenomena as are usually taken note of in critical analysis. The persuasion that such a cause operated has rather to be carried along, as a presumption arising from some quarter external to the ordinary sphere of critical work. And the effect to be given to it, in its relation to particular critical inquiries, is not always quite a simple matter. For the problem is to be solved rather by a certain tact and justness of mind, than by any assignable rules. Now, I think the disposition of the critic, even the believing critic, will be to depend much on the indications, or supposed indications, of pure criticism, so as to guard the prerogatives of his especial craft. On a balance of probabilities, he

may, naturally enough, be inclined to let these indications count for more than they are worth.

For example, let it be assumed that, on the ground of the general credit of the Scriptures, Genesis is to be taken as authentic narrative: let us say (that we may waive dispute with those who raise questions about degrees of inspiration), *generally* authentic. Then it may be said to be a very fair presumption that if Genesis be authentic, its date must be high. The strength of that presumption is measured by the strength of the plain critical presumption that the farther a narrative like this is removed in date from the facts it records, the less reliable it is likely to be. However, it is not impossible that the actual composition might be, relatively, late, and yet the narrative be authentic. Therefore I put it only as a presumption. It is a presumption strong enough to carry the weight of some doubts and difficulties, that would operate powerfully in the case of a book not so authenticated. But the influence it deserves, be that more or less, is apt to be dissipated and to disappear, in the detail of critical discussions; and it is apt to fail to reappear when the case is summed up.

It may be asked why I assume that critical indications, as appreciated by critics, will ever require to be weighed *against* any fair or reasonable presumption, drawn from the peculiar character and office of the Scriptures. Why not assume that the critical determination will always provide the proper and valid foundation of fact, on which faith may erect its superstructure? I answer, that, in my opinion, the latter assumption is an ungrounded one. Critics, in estimating probabilities, on evidence which, through no fault of theirs, is often very imperfect, must sometimes make mistakes; and those mistakes may very possibly create real difficulties for faith, if they are too submissively accepted. Moreover, there are temptations which bias the critical mind. For example, there is a temptation to bring the earlier books, if possible, down

later ; because so they come more within the range of a full application of critical principles. They fall then into a period of which more is known, which, in that sense, is "more historical ;" and so criticism gets them, or seems to get them, more thoroughly into its power.

But, indeed, it must be obvious how much depends on the conception the critic forms of the measure and manner in which the divine influence took effect on the Scriptures. Let Genesis again serve for an example. I have spoken of this as a reasonable presumption, that if the narrative of Genesis be authentic, its date, or the date of its written sources, must be high. Now there is another presumption, still more obvious, as I think, viz., that unless Genesis is inspired, its contents must be mainly legend ; pious and elevated legend, perhaps, but still legend. For no one carries the authorship higher than Moses. Now it is quite vain to talk of a history like this, even if composed at the date of Moses, being anything else than legendary, unless the author was divinely guided to find and record something better and worthier. The use of earlier writings will not help here, for the earlier writings would be legendary themselves ; *i.e.*, though they might include what was true, it would be hopelessly entangled in legendary matter.

Hence Ewald is perfectly consistent in his view of the early history. Believing in the God of Israel, he yet did not conceive of inspiration as rendering records trustworthy, but only as breathing lofty impulses into the minds of men, and clearing their view of high ideals. On those terms, the proper critical conclusion was that Genesis is legend. And the continual turning of that legend over and over, which he tries to prove to have occurred,—the conceiving of it again, and yet again, in altered forms at one date after another, till the series of transformations ended in the existing book—is an idea which should not be set down as an additional proof of the wantonness and profaneness of unbelief: it was really, after all, the only way left to express a kind of faith. The

only way in which value can accrue to the legend is to say that it has been operated on, purged, etherealised, inspired, by passing for ages through the holiest minds ; minds in which the living God maintained the worthiest impressions of Himself, and to which He gave the truest insight into man, and into man's relation to God and to the world. Thus it becomes charged, at last, with ideal truth, discharged of the elements most repugnant to right impressions, and stands as a poem or a dream, which men have sung or dreamed, more and more worthily, under the educative influence of ages of divine training. In that view, the later the date to which the final form of the book is ascribed (if it is a date at which the higher influences were still powerfully operative in select Jewish minds), the better the book must be supposed to be. And Ewald unquestionably had it at heart to maintain the dignity of the book as high as the principles he set out with could permit.

In short, although much of critical work lies outside the range of intelligence and acquirement of common Christians, yet criticism cannot escape reckoning with alternatives on which the common Christian mind claims valid right to believe and speak. Therefore it is good for it to have to reckon with the common Christian mind itself.

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