

MANDALS OF FAITH AND DUTY
Nº3.

* REVELATION, *

BX
9931
.M36
v.3

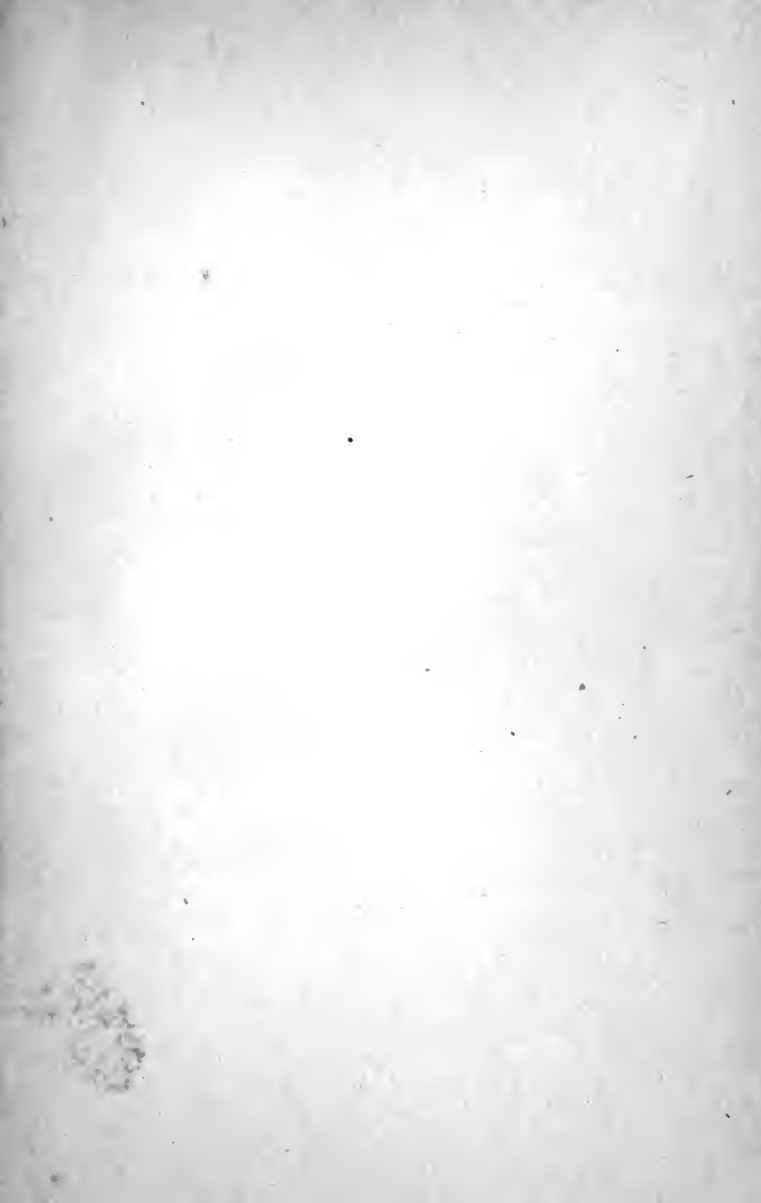
MAYWOOD, D. D.

J. M. Pappas

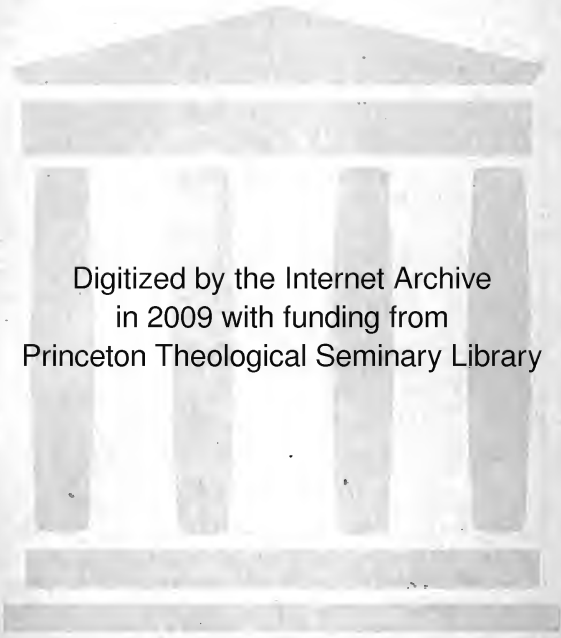
BX 9931 .M36 v.3
Atwood, I. M. 1838-1917.
Revelation











Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2009 with funding from
Princeton Theological Seminary Library

Manuals of Faith and Duty.

EDITED BY REV. J. S. CANTWELL, D.D.

A SERIES of short books in exposition of prominent teachings of the UNIVERSALIST CHURCH, and the moral and religious obligations of believers. They are prepared by writers selected for their ability to present in brief compass an instructive and helpful Manual on the subject undertaken. The volumes will be affirmative and constructive in statement, avoiding controversy, while specifically unfolding doctrines.

The MANUALS OF FAITH AND DUTY are issued at intervals of three or four months. Uniform in size, style, and price.

I. THE FATHERHOOD OF GOD.

By Rev. J. COLEMAN ADAMS, D.D., Chicago.

II. JESUS THE CHRIST.

By Rev. S. CRANE, D.D., Norwalk, O.

III. REVELATION.

By Rev. I. M. ATWOOD, D.D., President of the Theological School, Canton, N. Y.

IV. CHRIST IN THE LIFE.

By Rev. WARREN S. WOODBRIDGE, Medford, Mass.

V. SALVATION.

By Rev. ORELLO CONE, D.D., President of Buchtel College, Akron, O.

VI. THE BIRTH FROM ABOVE.

By Rev. CHARLES FOLLEN LEE, Charlestown, Mass.

No. VII. of this series will be "The Saviour of the World," by Rev. C. E. NASH, Akron, O. Other volumes and writers will be announced hereafter.

PUBLISHED BY THE

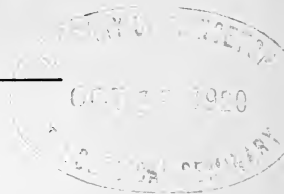
UNIVERSALIST PUBLISHING HOUSE,

BOSTON, MASS.

Western Branch: 69 Dearborn Street, Chicago.

✓
Manuals of Faith and Duty.

No. III.



REVELATION.

✓ BY

ISAAC M. ATWOOD, D.D.,

PRESIDENT OF THE THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL, CANTON, N. Y.

"GOD, HAVING OF OLD TIME SPOKEN UNTO THE FATHERS
IN THE PROPHETS BY DIVERS PORTIONS AND IN DIVERS MAN-
NERS, HATH AT THE END OF THESE DAYS SPOKEN UNTO US
IN HIS SON."

Hebrews i. 1, 2.

BOSTON :
UNIVERSALIST PUBLISHING HOUSE.
1891.

Copyright, 1889,
BY THE UNIVERSALIST PUBLISHING HOUSE.

SECOND EDITION.

University Press:
JOHN WILSON AND SON, CAMBRIDGE.

CONTENTS.



SECTION	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	5
I. THE BIBLE	11
II. NOT ONE BOOK BUT MANY	12
III. VERSIONS	13
IV. THEORIES OF THE BOOK	15
V. IS A SPECIAL REVELATION NECESSARY? IS IT PROBABLE?	21
VI. DIFFICULTIES	28
VII. MIRACLE	36
VIII. INSPIRATION AND REVELATION	52
IX. ENDS WHICH REVELATION SUBSERVES	55
X. THEOSOPHY AND REVELATION	77
XI. INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE	82
XII. AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE	86
XIII. CONCLUSION	89

Origen hath observed with singular sagacity, that he who believes the Scripture to have proceeded from Him who is the author of nature, may well expect to find the same sort of difficulties in it as are found in the constitution of nature; and, in a like way of reflection, it may be added, that he who denies the Scripture to have been from God upon account of these difficulties, may, for the very same reason, deny the world to have been from Him.

BISHOP BUTLER.

REVELATION.



INTRODUCTION.

THE true and large view of the subject treated in these pages takes in the fact that Revelation appears in nature, history, providence, and human life. The exact account of Revelation is the disclosure of God to man. It is important to a correct understanding of the department of this wide inquiry to which this Manual is principally devoted, that the scope of the subject be adequately grasped. The value of the particular disclosures with which our Bible makes us acquainted depends on the reality of the revelations made through other channels. If it is not the fact that God reveals himself in the outer world, in experience, and in the powers and laws of the human mind, the presumption is against any alleged revelation of himself. On the other hand, if the mind opens to the conception that the universe is the

expression of Divine ideas, that day unto day uttereth speech, without voice, and that, in the phrase of Bushnell, even every man's life is a plan of God, it will be borne easily by the logic of its general position to the particular conclusion implied in a special revelation. For it must ever be kept in mind that the study of nature and history only then predisposes to what is technically termed "unbelief," when it is pursued without recognition of the great truth, that the visible objects and products are manifestations of Invisible Power. It seems to be true that thus far in its history the modern doctrine of evolution tends to materialism; but this can scarcely continue to be its predominant effect. As it works itself clear of the swaddling-bands imposed on it by its origin and first use in science, and comes to consciousness in philosophy, it will assert with more and more distinctness the principle that lies at its heart, namely, the ever completer expression in higher visible forms of an immanent and eternal energy. A similar course may safely be predicted for other studies which at this moment appear to be leading men's minds to dreary negations and ultimate nothingness. Bacon's profound observation of the effect of the

study of Nature will be verified in the whole history of thought; and spiritualism, not materialism, be the philosophy of the future.

1. The underlying assumption in Revelation, then, is the existence of God. It seems trivial to say, if there be no God there can be no Revelation and no religion. But the significance of Revelation will depend on what is contained in the term "God." If we mean by it "the power with which we are everywhere in contact," or "the power not ourselves that makes for righteousness," or "the stream of tendency," and construe this power as something which we cannot more closely define because it cannot be more distinctly known, Revelation will be foreclosed. What cannot be known cannot be revealed. No matter by what metaphysics the conclusion is reached that God cannot be really known,—whether by that of the positivist Comte, or of the agnostic Spencer, or of the absolutist Fichte, or of the pantheist Spinoza, or of the materialist Büchner, or of the idealist Hartmann, or of the theist Hamilton,—the truth to be recognized is, that what cannot be known is practically non-existent.

2. Nor is the situation improved by saying that God is real, but impersonal. It is but com-

mon-sense to declare that an impersonal God is no God at all. The truth of this affirmation of the unsophisticated reason is copiously illustrated in the writings of all speculators who attempt to go on the hypothesis of an impersonal Deity. Either the constraint of logical consistency carries them swiftly along into pantheism, atheism, or materialism; or they escape these conclusions by palpable self-contradiction. One of the most insidious delusions discoverable in religious thought is the notion that the personal recedes as the spiritual emerges. Just the contrary is the fact. A person is not a body, but a spirit. It is in spirit that personality inheres. You do not find the person until you find the spirit. To speak of "the great Spirit of the universe" under the notion that the words absolve you from the obligation to think of God as a person, is to miss your way in the broadest light. If there is any such Spirit, personality is inseparable from it. The moment we lose our hold on God as a Spiritual Person, whose type we have in the spiritual personality of man, religion begins to slip from us, revelation becomes impossible, and the belief in human immortality fades into fantasy.

3. The conception of God under which the topic of Revelation is treated in this Manual is of "a Divine Mind and Will ruling the Universe, and holding moral relations with mankind." As such, He is conceived of as disclosing himself to man, a spiritual person of the same type, in the course and constitution of Nature, in the constitution of man, in human history, in the laws and life of the spirit, in the various religions of mankind, and in particular, and as confirmatory of all the others, in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. This book, however, except as to this Introduction, is confined to an account of what is known as the Christian Revelation.

4. Reflection on the problem will soon make it apparent that Revelation, whether through the outer world, man, or Christ, can only be such to a being whose inner and permanent nature is the same in kind as that of the Being revealed. The facts might be just what they are, but they would have no meaning to a being incapable of interpreting them. Knowledge does not pass between beings of different types of intelligence. If God is of one nature and man of another, it is impossible that the former should reveal himself to the latter. As well expect man to reveal

himself to the lion or the ostrich. There is no path open between them. But on the hypothesis of a common spiritual nature in man and in God, we have the condition of a revelation. The great doctrine of the Old Testament, that man is made in the image of God, which unfolds in the New into the completer and more engaging form, man the child of God, is, therefore, our warrant for considering any of the manifestations of the Divine power and wisdom, whether in the universe or in the words of our Bible, as Revelation. For they are a revelation only in so far as they are *disclosures of God to man*. And the possibility of such disclosure hinges on the fact that man is a spiritual person, as God is.

To gather up these points in a single sentence, Revelation is to be looked at largely as the whole process of Divine manifestation through all channels; the Being revealed is to be apprehended as a true and actual Person; the special disclosure of God in Christ is our immediate theme; and the possibility of revelation in any form, and, as a consequence, of meaning and value to our present study, depends on the fact of an essential likeness of nature in man and in God.

I. — THE BIBLE.

The view which we have taken of the subject in general requires us to answer, why we pitch on a certain book as containing, rather than other books, a Revelation? There are innumerable books: the world is filled with them. Some of them are of great antiquity, some are of rare worth, some contain much of the garnered wisdom of the race. Why select the Bible as the one in which God has particularly disclosed himself?

1. The first part of the answer is in the fact that the selection has been made already, and made by a process that we are compelled to respect. No class or set of people gave the Bible its pre-eminence among books. By a natural process, analogous to that by which Homer has his place in classical literature, the Bible has taken its position as the chief religious book of mankind.

2. Again, the presumption in favor of the Bible, created by its place in religious literature, is supported by its important relation to the chief institutions of society,—the family, government, the church. It is not too much to say that the

Bible is historically intertwined with the social fabrics that have been taking shape for thousands of years; and it is as indispensable to them as the figure to a lace.

3. Once more, the contents of the Bible, its themes, its characters, its power to vitalize the human soul, its association with the deepest life of two hundred generations, separate it from all other books, and make its study a duty where it is not embraced as a privilege. It would be easy to fill our pages with testimony of which these quaint words from Robert Boyle are a sample: "The Bible is indeed amongst books what the diamond is amongst stones,—the preciouslest and the sparklingest; the most apt to scatter light, and yet the solidest and most proper to make impressions."

II. — NOT ONE BOOK, BUT MANY.

What is the Bible? It is not one book, but many books. The periods of authorship range, in the Old Testament, from about 1400 B. C. to 400 B. C.; and in the New from the year 60 A. D. to about 100 A. D. No additions have been made to the Old Testament since the formation of the canon, which could not have been later than

300 B. C., and may have been much earlier. The books of the New Testament all belong to the first century. The questions, whether the canon of either Testament was formed by authority; whether the Divine Spirit presided over the selection of materials for the historical books, and the composition of the statutory, prophetic, and poetical books; whether the authorship has been correctly ascribed in every instance; whether some books were not excluded that should have been in the canon, and some retained that should have been excluded,—it is impossible to here enter into. Nor are they of so much importance as at first thought they might seem. For the character of the Bible, or, as Jerome called it, “Holy Library,” its influence in the world, its place in literature, are what they are, however it was formed; and its history and great pre-eminence, proved by *a posteriori* results, seem to vindicate in a truly remarkable degree the method, whatever it was, adopted in making up the collection.

III. — VERSIONS.

When we speak of “our English Bible,” the words imply that the Bible exists in other

tongues, and suggest the inquiry, In what language or languages were the various books originally written? The books of the Old Testament, produced during a period of about a thousand years, were all written originally in Hebrew. Versions of the Hebrew Scriptures were made into Aramaic (Targums), Greek (Septuagint), Latin (Vulgate), Syriac, Ethiopic, Arabic, Egyptian, Armenian, Gothic, Slavonic, and some other languages, as well as into English. The Aramaic and Greek were made before the Christian era. The others were made at the same time or in close connection with versions of the New Testament. The books of the New Testament, with possibly the exception of an original Hebrew copy of the Gospel by Matthew, were all written originally in Hellenistic, or "New Testament," Greek.

The subject of the original manuscripts of the books of both Testaments, of the amount of care used in their transcription, translation, and preservation, of the "various readings" and the reasons for them, of the most authentic versions and texts, has given rise to a separate literature of vast proportions, which, in the nature of the case, can be studied and familiarly known only

by Biblical scholars. It is sufficient to say here, that the results of the labor and the learning expended on this branch of knowledge permit us to rest in the general trustworthiness of the version supplied to us in "our English Bible." We might even go further and describe it as, for the most part, remarkably accurate, while its literary form alone constitutes it a classic.¹

IV. — THEORIES OF THE BOOK.

1. Holding that the Bible, in a manner peculiar to itself, gives evidence of a Revelation, precisely what view shall we take of the content and character of the Revelation? It is in place to note here the principal theories that have

¹ This remark is made with the Authorized Version in mind; but it is applicable to the Revised Version, which, while approximating more nearly literal accuracy, does not depart from the version of King James in a sufficient degree to mar its justly admired Saxon strength and beauty. It is quite true that a first requirement in a version is exactness; but grammatical precision is not always adequate. The Bible is literature as well as revelation. It embraces every variety of rhetorical structure. It is the great and almost unapproachable merit of the Authorized Version that it renders into corresponding English, and preserves in this dress, the diversified literature of the Bible. Many other translations exceed it in critical and grammatical exactness: all are inferior to it in literary power.

been held on the subject. Authentic information does not guide us far back of the advent of Christianity. At that date we may say, generally, there were two schools of Biblical interpreters among the Jews,—the literalists and the allegorists. We have examples of both in the use made of the Old Testament by writers in the New. It may be said that the sacred writings were held in high reverence by both schools; that they were appealed to as authority; that they were esteemed as oracles containing the commands of God; and that it was believed holy men had spoken in them as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. At the same time, it is apparent to the unbiassed reader that no such view of the infallibility of the record, or of the verbal importance of its language, as was subsequently maintained in certain quarters, was then held by any one.

2. The earliest teachers of Christianity continued the methods of interpretation that had been current among the Jews, with modifications and departures, according to the demands of personal genius or the access of the Spirit. Among the Apostolical Fathers, Ignatius and Barnabas incline to the allegorical method; while Clement

(of Rome) and Polycarp are, in their practical spirit and their pastoral simplicity, more in accord with the style of the New Testament epistles. The latter remark applies equally to the lately discovered document, "The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles," which there is some reason for thinking belongs to the same period. A similar line of difference in method marks off certain of the Church Fathers, as Tertullian and Clement (of Alexandria), from others, as the great Origen and Gregory Nazianzen, who revelled in allegory. It has been observed by the historians of Church opinions that all of the more eminent of the Fathers may be quoted on both sides of what has been described as "high doctrine" concerning the inspiration of the Scriptures. The fact in regard to the view held by the Fathers generally, including Augustine and Chrysostom, has been fairly summed up by Tholuck in the remark: "Although they had a general impression of the divinely inspired character of Scripture, the opinion that its language was human and imperfect was held to be unmistakable."¹

¹ The Doctrine of Inspiration (Translation), in Kitto's Journal of Sacred Literature.

3. The period from Augustine to the Protestant Reformation is not marked by any change of view among Biblical scholars concerning Holy Scripture. Definite opinions, based on speculation or on careful criticism, are not to be met with. The traditional view seems to have been held by such scholastics as Aquinas and Abelard, by Bellarmine, by Erasmus, and by other writers of this Middle Period, who, while of equal authority in their own day, are less known to ours. But with the Reformation arose a definite new theory,—the “high doctrine” already referred to. This theory, gradually developed, and finally taken up as a complete defence of Protestantism against the dogma of Church authority, affirmed, as expounded by Professor Voetius of the University of Utrecht, that “not a word is contained in the Holy Scriptures which was not in the strictest sense inspired, the very interpunctuation not excepted: even what the writers previously knew was given them afresh by inspiration.” Professor Gaussen, of Geneva, at a later date published an elaborate defence¹ of the extreme doctrine, holding that the Divine Spirit exercised

¹ *Theopneustia*, translated by Dr. E. N. Kirk. New York: 1850.

such power over the authors of the Holy Scriptures as "to guide them even in the employment of the words they were to use, and to preserve them from all error, as well as from every omission." In England, in America, and particularly in Scotland, this was for nearly two hundred years the orthodox theory of the way in which the Scriptures were produced. In some instances theologians recurred to the earlier and more moderate doctrine; but the prevalent teaching on the subject, over nearly the whole extent of Protestant Christendom, from the middle of the seventeenth till after the close of the eighteenth century, was that of the "Consensus Helveticus," which sought to substitute an infallible Bible for an infallible Church.

4. The remaining theories may be included under two classes,—the Rationalistic and the Reasonable. The Rationalistic discerns nothing supernatural nor authoritative in the Scriptures or in the way in which they were produced. The Bible is a collection of religious books, peculiar among books in their topic and interesting as literature; but they are, in whole and in every part, of strictly human origin. The alleged supernatural and miraculous phenomena in them

are to be regarded as instances of the credulity or of the myth-making faculty of mankind. The Bible cannot be considered a revelation in any sense in which Plato, Goethe, Shakspeare, are not also a revelation.

What we take the liberty of terming the Reasonable view, maintains that the Bible is the Word of God, as no other book can claim to be; that it is the record of a particular and progressive disclosure of God, culminating in the person and mission of Jesus Christ; that by no fair construction either of its history or its contents can the Biblical record be made to assume the character of a legendary accretion, in which certain very commonplace facts of human history have been gradually wrought over and raised into supernatural occurrences; but that the opposite is the true order of facts and events,—namely, that certain extraordinary disclosures of Divine truth and power and providence have taken an obviously human setting; and that a principal value of the Revelation made through the Bible consists in the effect it has to authenticate and give meaning to the revelations made by other means.

This view does not encumber itself with the

post-Reformation dogma of plenary inspiration, nor with the defence and reconciliation of palpable errors in chronology, history, and science. It leaves room for the free play of reverent criticism; and while it is not quite credulous enough to accept all the surmises and vigorous, not to say violent, redactions of Wellhausen, Kuenen, and their school, still less to entertain anything more than mild compassion for the romancing of some of their imitators, it permits a lively interest in all genuine research, confident that when the whole truth is known the Bible will stand stronger in the faith and affection of the world.¹

V. — IS A SPECIAL REVELATION NECESSARY?

IS IT PROBABLE?

It was said in the last section that a principal value of the revelation made through

¹ The most thorough, scholarly, and enlightened presentation of what we have styled "The Reasonable View" to be met with in English is Dr. Geo. T. Ladd's "Doctrine of Sacred Scripture: A Critical, Historical, and Dogmatic Inquiry into the Origin and Nature of the Old and New Testaments," 2 vols., 1886. Dr. Ladd has since given in a briefer and more popular form the principal results of the more elaborate treatise in a single volume, entitled "What is the Bible?"

the Bible is the effect it has to authenticate the revelations made through other channels. It is worth while to look into this proposition more critically and see what warrant it has; for this is a pivotal point in our study. It is a debatable question whether, if God had not spoken by the mouth of prophets and apostles, that is, by some method of special disclosure, His creation and providence would have made Him known to man. Let us admit, however, that the human mind could and would come to a more or less firm conviction of the reality of Divine Being, without particular aid, and by processes similar to those employed in acquiring a knowledge of Nature. Let us go farther, and say, that by induction, analogy, and intuition men might reach all the conclusions affirmed by Christianity,—such as the existence of God, the law of righteousness, the duty of love, the spiritual and immortal nature of man,—still it will appear on examination that the disclosure known as revelation is by no means rendered unnecessary.

1. In the absence of a revelation it cannot be supposed that it would be more easy than now to awaken interest in religious truth. If

we had no "Thus saith the Lord" we should still have the ignorant, the indifferent, the unreligious and the irreligious to deal with. Those of us persuaded of the truths of religion would then as now feel their solemnity and importance, and would be trying to make others feel them. What would be our method? We should be obliged to conduct an argument of the same general nature as that now employed in treatises on Natural Theology. We should appeal to reason and depend on inference. We should attempt to make out by these means the truths of the being of God, of the immortality of man, of accountability, of forgiveness, of salvation. Let us suppose that we were entirely successful in our argument; that our reasoning were flawless and our conclusions valid: would they be likely to produce conviction? Would they awaken and maintain interest in the great themes discussed? We suspect not.

2. For our most reasonable as well as our most sceptical hearers would be wholly justified in responding to our elaborate argument, — as we cannot doubt they would respond: "Your reasoning is plausible, but far from

convincing. You affirm that there is a God. You say He is intimately related to men and deeply interested in their welfare; that He has been doing good to them and caring for them from the beginning; and that when they pass out of this world He receives them into His more immediate presence. How is all this to be reconciled with the fact that not an intelligible word or sign has ever come from Him or from His realm? He is, by your hypothesis, a person, free, mighty, loving. What has hindered Him from making himself known, in some direct and unmistakable manner, in the long period since man began to exist on this planet? Is it credible that there is such a Being as you describe and ask others to believe in, and yet no race nor generation of men ever heard from Him? Do you not see that one line of communication from Him would be worth more than a whole library of inferential reasonings?"

3. That such would be the attitude of those we should seek to persuade, in the absence of any special revelation, there is no reason to doubt. Those who now are swift to assure us that a special revelation is an impertinence

would be the first to taunt us with the fatal fact that no such revelation had been made. That is to say, if we had no revelation, the argument for the truths of religion remaining just the same, we should desire a revelation to render our argument conclusive. The circumstance that no means of verifying our reasoning existed could not fail to leave our religious science in a condition of hopeless embarrassment.

4. It is impossible, we think, to put the need of a special revelation in a stronger light. The case is analogous to that of the astronomers before the invention of the telescope. An astronomer might demonstrate to his own satisfaction, and to that of most other astronomers, the existence of a planet, or other celestial body, in a given quarter of the heavens; but none of them could see it. No instrument known to science could penetrate so far into space. Now they might all agree in saying that the demonstration was so perfect as to make sight superfluous. They might exhibit impatience with those who refused to put perfect faith in their calculations, and loudly insist that disbelief in such a case is mere contumacy. But can there be a doubt that every man of them would be

glad to find a way of looking to the spot and verifying his prediction? What would be thought of the sanity of the astronomer who, in these circumstances, decried the utility of telescopes, and professed himself pleased that there was none powerful enough to draw to earth the distant stranger's beam? Is it not too apparent to require a word of testimony, that all astronomers, and all other persons having any acquaintance with such subjects, would experience a thrill of joy on the announcement that Rosse or Clarke had perfected an instrument which enabled the human eye to look upon the very face of the planet known hitherto only by computation? All *a priori* objections to a revelation fall to the ground before the undeniable truth that if we had no such revelation, all persons would wish that we had. The believer would desire it, that he might be certified of the validity of the grounds of his faith: the doubter, that he might not be required to take so much on trust.

5. If a revelation be needful, a revelation is probable; for, apart from the broad general principle that the scheme of creation in all its parts is such as permits us to expect whatever has been found to be necessary to mankind, we

can scarcely err in thinking that it would not be like God to withhold himself from His children. If God is, He must disclose himself. If He does not reveal himself, we lack the primary ground of belief that He is. It is out of the power of any force or authority that can be conceived of — creed or canon or church — to maintain belief in a God that gives no sign. And if we allow that He reveals himself in His works, — in nature, man, history, as we are forward to do, — yet if it can be successfully maintained that He never reveals himself in any other way, a deep shadow of doubt at once falls on the verity of the opinion that God is disclosed in what are called His works. The truth is, both phases of revelation stand or fall together. If God is not revealed in nature, it is futile to argue that He is revealed through the persons and processes of which we have the record in our Bible. Conversely, if there has been no such revelation of God as the Bible gives account of, the wit of man will forever fail to establish even a fair presumption that God is disclosing himself in nature. It comes to this, then, that the atheist is the only one who can consistently deny the probability of historic revelation.

6. The above reasoning does not authorize the conclusion that we have in our Bible either the only special revelation God has made, or an instance of such revelation. That is a different question. In a previous section¹ reasons were offered for the opinion that the Bible is the record of a special revelation. It is in place to remark here, that when we see how probable and necessary *some* revelation from God is, we are immediately face to face with the question, Is Christianity that revelation, or do we seek another? If we were all able to lay aside prejudice and prepossession, it is probable we should view this, as well as many other subjects, differently from what we now do. But is there any good ground for thinking that we should see reasons for selecting some other system, or, finally, for discarding the Christian as wanting the essential marks of a revelation?

VI. — DIFFICULTIES.

The common difficulty of all religions is in the fact that they have their ground in the assumed reality of things unseen. Sense and spirit are the two poles of thought and the two realms

¹ See pp. 11, 12.

of being. In the body we are compelled to deal primarily and continually with the former. Things and realms apprehensible by means of the senses are said to be matters of knowledge. The thoughtful and educated recognize, also, the reality of many things for a knowledge of which we are not dependent on the senses,—like the properties of numbers, the relation of ideas, the perception of truth. But neither the common nor the educated mind readily takes hold of the fact that the power to discern moral truth and to make moral discriminations implies a spiritual man, as much as the power to distinguish odor or color or weight implies a physical man. “Fools and slow of heart,” is the not inappropriate characterization of multitudes of mankind. To this dulness of moral apprehension more than to anything else is to be attributed that mood of mind which staggers at the promises of God. Inability to discern spiritual truth, whether due to an unawakened moral nature or to wilful disregard of the claims of that nature, is the explanation of most of the difficulties with which unbelief invests religion. It is usual to speak of “the difficulties of religion:” it would be more accurate to speak of

the difficulties of irreligion ; for it is the irreligious temper that creates the difficulties. And this temper pervades more or less all persons. It is an inevitable concomitant of our earthly environment.

1. But a religion of which revelation is the prominent feature presents peculiar obstacles to human infirmity. Besides dealing with the spiritual and unseen, and thus drawing from the start on faith, it assumes the supernatural and asserts the miraculous. To the superstitious, whose credulity is more active than their judgment, these elements constitute an attraction ; but to the prosaic part of mankind, to the critical and contentious, to such as have had their wits sharpened without a corresponding development of reverence, to students of the phenomena of the natural world in which physical effects are exactly measured by physical causes, to students of mythology, folk-lore, and fable, and, in fine, to many careful and sincere truth-seekers, who are desirous of knowing just what the fact is, and who are cautious because they would not be deceived,—the supernatural and miracle are impediments in the way of a hearty acceptance of the Christian religion.

2. In our day we have conditions in the religious world which did not belong to any former era. There are large numbers of people—how large no one can tell—in actual or nominal relation with the churches, comprising in some instances a considerable proportion of a whole denomination, who are in real difficulty—we had almost said distress—on account of the fact that Christianity is encumbered, as they think, with miracle. They are not critics of Christianity, nor uninterested outsiders: Christianity is their religion. They are ardently attached to it, and disposed to share its fortunes. They appreciate its vast services to mankind and its great worth. They desire to see it “still full high advanced,” and would esteem its destruction or decline an unspeakable calamity. But its supernaturalism and its miracles appear to them not only an unessential part of the system, but a hindrance and misfortune. They do not see how it could be done, but they do not conceal their conviction that if the entire texture of supernaturalism were eliminated from Christianity it would be an immense gain.

3. Such an extraordinary state of facts in the community of Christians demands attention.

It may be dealt with in two ways: It may be treated with indignation and scorn, as iniquitous and inexcusable disloyalty to the cause, or it may be looked on as a phenomenon of the age, due to peculiar causes which have not always been at work. So viewed, it may be studied in a sympathetic spirit, its real significance and its true motive discerned; allowance may be made for it; alarm on one side and irritation on the other allayed; and efforts made to remove the difficulty, which is recognized as real, not by scolding, but by patient and thorough examination. The latter, we scarcely need add, is in our judgment the proper course. In the restricted space at our command we can do little more in this place than give a sample of the method we approve.

(1) Let it be observed, in the first place, that supernatural phenomena, whether fact or fiction, do not comprise the subject-matter of revelation. They are incidental only. The staple of revelation is made up of truths, ideas, ordinances, facts disclosed; or, as in the case of Christianity, of a person who embodies these. Portents and miracles are incidental only. They derive their importance from two circumstances: (*a*) That

they challenge belief; (b) That they are universally regarded as inseparable from a revelation.

(2) Are they inseparable? Can there be no disclosure of God to man—no direct, personal, palpable disclosure, without supernatural accompaniments? This is the kernel of the matter. Let us analyze the event to which this name “revelation” is given. It is the communication from God, a spiritual person, of facts, truths, ideas, precepts,—an order of life,—to men, spiritual persons. In the one case, however, the spiritual personality is unveiled and without shadow: in the other it is veiled in flesh. God is not hidden: it is we that are masked in flesh. And because this is so, our only means of apprehension is through this veil,—through our physical organs. We cannot know God, therefore, unless He “becomes like one of us,” appearing in physical form; or unless we temporarily emerge from our bodily vesture. If God should manifest himself in the flesh we could know Him as we know each other. If we should transcend in some way our physical environment, it is conceivable that we might know God as spirit knows spirit. But either

of these things, accomplished in this world and among men, would constitute a supernatural occurrence. The supernaturalism inheres in the nature of the case.

(3) The other possible modes of making a revelation, as we conceive the subject, are, (*a*) that God might select a human medium of communication, whom He should suitably endow or inspire. This would plainly be an act transcending human experience and human power, and so answering to the idea of the supernatural. (*b*) He might choose a celestial messenger, and send him to men. But the appearance of such a messenger among men would be, obviously, a supernatural event. (*c*) He might inspire directly, either each individual of the race, or such individuals as might be favorably situated for spreading the knowledge with which they should be thus possessed.

Some persons, who evidently have not thought profoundly on the subject, suppose that in the last case we should have revelation without supernatural accompaniment. God puts His impulse, or sentiments, or ideas into men's minds, it is said, as He

puts His breath into their nostrils. They give forth what is inspired in them, unconscious that it is more than their ordinary thinking, or, at least, unaware that it is from any higher source. But it is recognized by mankind, is carefully treasured, and in due time finds its place with the sacred scriptures of the world.

(4) This theory of the facts is hardly satisfactory. In the first place, it is to be said, that the inspiration of the individual is either real or fictitious. If it is fictitious, nothing is communicated. If it is real, then the impulses, ideas, sentiments, are actually imparted to the human spirit by the Divine Spirit. Again, either these impulses, sentiments, ideas, are *something more* than the regular stock of human thought, or there is nothing given which it is not a misuse of language to designate as "revelation;" nothing, therefore, for mankind to recognize. For recognition implies certain marks by which a thing may be distinguished from other things. But unless there is *something more* than the normal products of thought, how is mankind to detect and separate the products of inspiration?

The moment we put our minds closely to the facts, we see that the alternative is either to admit an event for which there is no strictly natural explanation, and which is, therefore, correctly described as supernatural, or discard the notion of a revelation altogether. The essence of the matter is, that knowledge and impulses are conveyed to men from God; and that they are of such a nature as to stamp them, either at the time or finally, as of superhuman origin. Whether the mind to whom they are imparted is conscious of their source or not, cannot alter the fact that they are of a special character, that they are from above, in a sense different from that in which mathematical or philosophical knowledge is from above, and that the Divine Mind was moved to communicate them.

VII. — MIRACLE.

What has been said of the supernatural in general leads up to a particular inquiry concerning miracle. The supernatural is the genus: miracle is the species. The idea of the supernatural is, that God discloses himself in a way of freedom analogous to that

in which human personality is shown. Law is always impersonal. There is not a known instance of personality expressed by law. If the activities of human beings were the manifestations of law, and law only, men would not be distinguishable from other objects — plants, minerals, gases — in which the energies of nature appear. It is the apprehension that their activities are, for the most part, self-determined, which gives rise to the notion of their personality. Freedom, real freedom, is of the essence of our own nature, and is the mark by which we are distinguished from all below us.

1. Attention to the problem will press on the mind the conviction that the Divine Personality is disclosed in a way exactly similar to that in which the human personality announces itself. If we could hold fast consistently to the idea that God manifests himself only through unvarying law, the result would be that we should cease to think of God as a person. And if we ceased to think of Him as a person, we should presently lose Him altogether; for as an impersonal man is no man at all, so an impersonal God is no God

at all. It follows, that if we are to retain the idea of God, not to say belief in Him, we must conceive of Him as a person; and if we conceive of Him as a person, we must attribute to Him a freedom of action incompatible with the notion that He never discloses himself except through unvarying law.

2. It thus appears that the very idea of God carries with it the idea of the supernatural. He who denies the supernatural logically denies God; for the supernatural is, in idea, the conception of Divine action determined by a free spirit, after the analogy of human action, instead of action constrained by necessity. All the reasons ever offered for rejecting supernaturalism are found on analysis to be equally reasons for rejecting theism. To say that there is a God, personal and free, and to follow that declaration by saying that He must not be supposed ever to act in His universe in any way different from that in which atoms or energies act, is to approach dangerously near self-contradiction.

3. It may be thought that such self-contradiction is avoided by the hypothesis that action on the part of a *perfect* being, who is

also free, takes the form of unvarying law. That is His mode. His freedom is located at the point of His choice of a regulated and unchanging order. It is not the order which constrains Him, but His perfection that requires the order. In the eternal order of the creation, it is said, we have the characteristic mark of God; in all things unstable and capricious we recognize imperfect man.

That unchanging order is *a* mode of the Divine manifestation is unquestionable; but that it is *the* mode is incapable of proof, and is intrinsically improbable. So far as we know, the more perfect a being is the more spontaneous and voluntary do his activities become; the less is he under law. A distinction is to be observed between the *use* of a regulated order and *subserviency* to it. The use of such an order evinces perfection: at the same time, and in the same degree, perfection disdains the bondage of an order which is its instrument and not its autocrat. If we grant—what no one can know to be the fact—that God chose law as the mode of His manifestation, and the sole mode, the supernaturalism remains. He who supposes

that God at the beginning, by a free act, precisely similar to that by which Aristotle chose his method of communicating instruction to his royal pupil, made law His mode of manifestation, must conceive that God acted, *at that point*, in just the way which the supernaturalist contends that He has since acted. It is simply the difference between locating the phenomenon at the beginning or subsequently. Unless we make the mode of the Divine manifestation a necessary mode, by which He is bound, so that He cannot manifest himself otherwise, it is plain that there was a period when He was not confined to law—certainly not to the laws observed by us. It comes, then, to the same complexion at last. We are supernaturalists, in some fashion, if we are theists. We may choose to be eccentric about it, or we may fall into line with the view of the great thinkers in philosophy and in religion; but we cannot separate things which the laws of thought make parts of one whole.¹

¹ Here it is, in this intellectual presupposition of any emerging world, this prior condition of the natural, that we meet a persistent "supernatural," in the idea of which the very essence of the religious problem lies, and without ref-

4. Now a miracle is an instance of the supernatural.¹ In other terms, it is an expression, in a given case, of that free personal action which is inseparable from our idea of a personal God. But God may be acting in that manner, for aught that we know, continually and in every part of His creation. What is it that brings any instance of such action by Him to our particular notice? It is its occurrence in the realm with which we are in contact by our physical senses. In that realm we are accustomed to expect uniform antecedents to occurrences. The only conceivable exceptions are where a being possessed of volition intervenes. We explain all such exceptions at once by reference to the action of that personal force

erence to which the order of Nature can tell us of nothing but itself; for God is not there. Nature therefore can never swallow up the supernatural, any more than time can swallow up eternity; they subsist and are intelligible only together; and nothing can be more mistaken than to treat them as mutually exclusive.—JAMES MARTINEAU: *A Study of Religion*, vol. i. pp. 7, 8.

¹ A miracle is an event which the forces of Nature—including the natural powers of man—cannot of themselves produce, and which must therefore be referred to a supernatural agency.—PROF. G. P. FISHER: *Christian Evidences*, p. 9. Compare “*What is the Bible?*” p. 156 *et seq.*

called *will*. But so far as human beings are concerned, an act of will, while in its inception and in its connection with the physical organism quite as inexplicable as any miracle, can only be manifest to others than the actor through the body; and the activities of the body are open to inspection by the senses. The effects produced in our world by the intervention of the human will are, therefore, classed as natural phenomena,¹ of which science can give account. But effects produced in our world without the use of physical agents, and which are not referable to any law of Nature, are attributed to the Divine Will and are classed as miracles. A miracle, then, follows the analogy of events produced by the intervention of the human will: the dif-

¹ Not, however, by all. Horace Bushnell, in his celebrated treatise, entitled "Nature and the Supernatural," classes all acts springing directly from will as supernatural. The late President Mark Hopkins, adopting the theory of Bushnell, states the case in these words: "If that which is in God be not nature, but supernatural, why should we call that in us by which we are in the image of God, nature? Here I suppose we find the true line between nature and the supernatural. All spirit and spiritual activity, whether it be morally good or evil, is supernatural. All free causation is supernatural. — *Outline Study of Man*, p. 258.

ference being that in the one case the means used by the will are apparent, in the other they are not. This is the essence of the phenomenon called a miracle. It is the sign of the presence of God in the realm of physical causation, acting in the freedom of His personality where He ordinarily acts by the method of law.¹

5. It is the opinion—perhaps we should say conviction—of many persons that “miracles do not happen.” If, after a candid and patient examination of the alleged event, one is persuaded that miracle does not happen, there is no more to be said. He sees the fact and the reasons as they appear to his mind. A review of the subject may change his opinion; but until the evidence in the case assumes a different aspect to his mind miracles certainly do not exist for him. It is our belief, however, that the number of persons

¹ Now if we examine the conception of the miracle which seems to be required by the teaching of both the Old and the New Testaments, we find that it includes three elements. It is implied, in the first place, that a miracle is *not* an event of ordinary experience; secondly, that it *is* the product of God's immediate presence and activity; thirdly, that it is a *sign*, or proof, or reminder to men, which has a moral and religious significance. — DR. GEO. T. LADD. “*What is the Bible?*” pp. 161, 162.

who have given the question a calm and candid investigation, and as a result have abandoned miracle, is not large. We judge that the usual course with those who are found denying miracle is to take up a position of criticism or hostility to miracles without much direct thought on the subject, but as the result of personal or literary associations, or on account of the influence of the "atmosphere" in which their opinions are forming. It is matter of observation that opinions on the subject are constantly undergoing change, both from belief to disbelief and from unbelief to faith. It is sometimes said that scepticism is on the increase. So it is in some circles; but belief is increasing in other circles. On the whole, there can be no doubt that the human soul is getting nearer to the truth in the premises. To those who think that Squire Wendover found the truth it will not be questioned that the tendency is toward discarding miracle; to us, who hold that miracle is as credible as belief in God or in immortality, there is not a doubt that faith steadily wins the field of thought.

6. This is not a place where the subject

can be drawn out to anything like adequate treatment. But it may be noticed that the consideration which usually carries the day with thoughtful persons is the discovery that belief in a personal God and in the supernatural stand or fall together. This was perceived and candidly admitted by John Stuart Mill, who chose the alternative of raising the question, whether there is evidence of the existence of a personal Deity. Professor Huxley—another of the most acute thinkers and consistent reasoners in the ranks of the agnostics—discerns the same fact. In a letter to the *Spectator*, Feb. 10, 1866, he defends himself from the charge of having avowed atheism: “I cannot take this position with honesty, inasmuch as it is, and always has been, a favorite tenet of mine that atheism is as absurd, logically speaking, as polytheism.” In the same letter he remarks, “Denying the possibility of miracles seems to me quite as unjustifiable as speculative atheism.” The truth clearly discerned by this penetrating mind is, that one who believes in a God cannot consistently deny that “miracles happen;” and one who even takes the agnostic position, refusing to say whether there

is a God or not, is estopped from "denying the possibility of miracles" until he is ready to announce flatly that there is no God.

The overwhelming majority of those who think on the problem at all are not willing to take even an agnostic position on the subject of the existence of God. They cling to theism; and it is a mere matter of logic whether they shall take with it what all close and clear thinkers are not long in discerning to be a constituent part,—belief in the supernatural with the corollary of miracle. The same fact rises to view from another point of observation: those who give up the supernatural and miracle, and adhere to the position, are apt to slip by easy and natural stages into distrust of the actual personality of God; thence into doubt of the existence of God,—agnosticism; and at that half-way house take shelter, until driven out and started, either this way toward theism, or that way toward atheism.

7. But it is rejoined, The question is not, whether God *might* work a miracle, but whether we have any satisfactory evidence that He has or does. "Satisfactory" to whom? The evidence that God has done

what every theist must allow He *can* do, has seemed "satisfactory" to many millions of mankind, including the greater proportion of the most acute and learned of our race. It is the habit of some writers in our day to say—what we presume they have come to believe—that the belief in miracle is passing away; that reasonable and well-informed people have given up miracle, as they have the idea of a personal Devil; and that the notion lingers only in benighted circles, or among persons who, having passed the meridian of life, do not readily change their opinions. When one looks into the facts this assumption appears highly ludicrous. Not to go outside of Christendom, the fact is that there is not a sect of even nominal Christians that takes the position of the rejection of miracle. There are individuals and parties, or schools, in several sects who repudiate the supernatural. But taken all together they do not number as many as a sect like the Quakers or the Mennonites. The great sects of Christendom, together with almost all the small ones, stand on this question where the Church has stood from the beginning. It is claimed

that the scientists and the influential thinkers of the age, most of whom are not in any sect, have taken up the position on this subject to which all Christians must presently advance. It may be so, but there is not more evidence of it than there was of the same result at the beginning of this century; while the evidence against it is massive and obstinate.

It is not, however, the fact that the question is what the rejoinder asserts. So far as we have noted, the point of controversy always is, whether God *can* work a miracle,—whether it is possible. Those who concede that it is possible will be remanded to the discussion of its probability. This will arise over some alleged instance or series of instances. When the discussion takes that form each case must be examined on its merits. We think it will be agreed on all hands that it would be a most extraordinary outcome of the examination of the thousands of cases of a phenomenon conceded to be possible, to find not one that is actual. In other terms, we apprehend that the real pith of the objector's contention will be discovered to be gone when he proceeds on the assumption that miracle is possible. For a

miracle can only be possible on the assumption of the reality of the supernatural.

8. The space we give to a discussion of the supernatural and miracle is warranted, not alone by the intrinsic interest of the subject, but by its inseparable relation to revelation. We have seen that revelation involves the supernatural. It is but a different expression of the same fact to say that the specific end subserved by miracle is to attest revelation. The account given of it shows that it is a sign of the presence of a Personal Power. "In a miracle the will of God acts directly and produces outward effects with no intervening agency. This our wills cannot do. Hence a miracle is the great seal of God to any communication from himself."¹

There are those who doubt the validity of this position. They say that a revelation, if true, attests itself; that the miracle is the part of the alleged revelation that taxes belief; and that so far from supporting the revelation, miracles tend to discredit it. It has been remarked by a learned and discriminating modern critic:² "If miracles were, in the estimate of a former age, among the chief *supports* of Christianity,

¹ President Hopkins.

² Baden Powell.

they are at present among the main *difficulties* and hindrances to its acceptance."

The force of this objection would be very great as against the idea that miracles are the only or main support of revelation. This position has sometimes been taken by Christian apologists; but it is obviously indefensible. The true position, as we apprehend, is that the chief vindication of the reality of an alleged revelation must be found in the manner in which it bears the test to which time subjects it. If it did not bear this internal and practical test, neither miracles nor any other external supports could maintain its credit. But it by no means follows that miracles are thereby proved to be unessential to revelation. For the fact is, that without the impression made in favor of the revelation by "signs and wonders and mighty acts," in the beginning, it would not have been put to the practical test. The first persuasion produced by Christianity was that it came from God. This, in the beginning, drew attention to it, created conviction for it, attached men to it; and it was the power of God, witnessed by miracles, accompanying the Messenger and the message, that wrought this persuasion. We believe in it

now because it has borne the great test; men then believed that it would bear the test because it was from God. If they had not believed it to be from God they would never have accepted it and put it to the test.

Suppose now *we* turn round and deny the miracles with which the planting of our religion is historically blended; observe in what a predicament we place both the Christian fathers and ourselves. They accepted Christianity for reasons not only inadequate, but spurious. We owe this greatest of blessings to their credulity. If they had known how to detect imposture and sift evidence we should not have the Gospel. But the system which, for reasons wholly unfounded, got a chance to be tried, proves to be sound and beneficent. That which there was every reason to reject beforehand, now vindicates itself as the system which there is every reason to accept. Again, we reject it for the very reason that influenced them to accept it. But if they had not accepted it for a false cause, we should have had no opportunity to accept it for a true one.

Further, the miraculous element, which played so essential a part in the beginning and has been so closely identified with our religion through-

out, remains an integral portion of the structure. The suggestion has been made that the miraculous element be eliminated. There is no process by which this can be accomplished. The natural, the spiritual, the supernatural are inextricably blended in the only records of the beginnings of our religion which we possess. Together they make the complete and unique phenomenon which has attracted the eye and won the heart and captured the understanding of the best portion of the world. Take out the natural, and there is no picture; take out the spiritual or the supernatural, the result is the same,—no picture.¹

VIII. — INSPIRATION AND REVELATION.

The use of the term “inspiration” directs thought to the distinction between revelation and inspiration. By “revelation,” as already defined, we understand the disclosure of God to men. By “inspiration” we mean a certain exaltation of the human spirit, produced by the

¹ The natural and supernatural are blended in the life and teachings of Christ in the most harmonious and vigorous way. Those who have been strenuous to reject the one, though they have striven long and hard to retain the other, have met with very partial success.—PRESIDENT BASCOM: *Philosophy of Religion*, p. 261.

action of the Divine Spirit upon it, in which the things of God, the realities of the spiritual world, become subjects of consciousness. It is apparent that only persons can be inspired. When we speak of the Bible, or of any book or document, as "inspired," we do so by the figure of speech called metonymy. Strictly speaking, language is never inspired.

1. The terms employed by Saint Paul,¹ in speaking of the "sacred writings," have sometimes been interpreted as teaching that the language of the Bible is inspired, — divinely breathed (*θεόπνευστος*). The only consistent position for one to take who advocates this interpretation is that of the verbal and plenary inspiration of the Scriptures already discussed. If the *language* was divinely breathed, it was, in the most exact sense, dictated; and the extreme doctrine of Voetius, Gaussen, and the post-Reformation theologians is established. That this is a wholly untenable position, in general, is now so uniformly conceded that contention is superfluous; but that it is equally an error in this particular case, becomes apparent the moment we consider the facts. Saint Paul was speaking

¹ 2 Timothy iii. 16.

of the Old-Testament Scriptures. We have the best possible testimony as to the manner in which he regarded the language, or verbal form, of those writings; it is furnished by his own frequent use of them in his letters. If he believed that the language was inspired,—divinely breathed,—he must have felt under a constant and solemn obligation to get the exact words in every case, and transcribe them with scrupulous fidelity. But he has quoted the Old Testament with so much latitude of language, in many places, as to leave scholars in doubt of the identity of the passage. Surely a teacher who himself used the sacred writings with so little regard to verbal exactness must not be appealed to as authority for the doctrine that the language of Scripture was directly dictated by the Divine Spirit. The reasonable view is that “men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit.”¹ Their inspiration was from God: their speech was their own.

2. It is pertinent to remark here, that since the exigency which led to the invention of the theory of complete verbal inspiration has passed, we are able to see that it could not have served

¹ 2 Peter i. 21.

the purpose had the fact been as the theory supposed. An inspired record of a revelation implies inspired transcribers and translators. If we could not have the latter, we should miss the chief advantage of having the former. Our English Bible would be only a translation of inspired language: it would not be inspired language. If we consider the number of various readings and of errors that exist in the text, we shall be less eager to fasten a theory on our Bible than at this date would be quite as likely to stereotype error as to preserve truth. Time was when even Christian scholars imagined that the fact in the case could be altered by a theory or by belief. Let us hope that a better mind now universally prevails; that Christian scholars, at least, are convinced of the futility, if not of the wickedness, of trying to make the fact to be other than it is; and that the public is desirous, not of believing this or that because it is "safe" or "orthodox," but of knowing the truth and standing on it.

IX.—ENDS WHICH REVELATION SUBSERVES.

We turn now to a question of high practical concern: What particular ends does an his-

toric revelation subserve? A general answer to this question has been anticipated in showing the dependence of the natural disclosures of God on the supernatural. The great end accomplished by a special revelation is, undoubtedly, to confirm to mankind the truth of the persuasion borne in on the mind from a study of physical nature and of human history.

1. But there are certain particular ends which a revelation serves in the economy of Providence, first among which may be noticed the effect it has on religion. Religion has two principal parts: (1) the objective facts,—God, duty, immortality, and the whole circle and system of doctrines that arise out of these great ideas; (2) the subjective consciousness of God, duty, immortality, and the related facts; which converts theology into piety, ethics into righteousness, and dogma into faith. The greatest service which can be performed for religion is to translate its facts into faiths; in other words, to make men conscious of its great realities, so that what they assent to as propositions of the reason they shall feel as vital impulses of the soul. This is the hard thing to accomplish in relig-

ion. Here is where the work of the Church lags, and the hearer of the word, going away and forgetting what manner of spirit he is of, ceases to be a doer of the word. Any influence contributing even temporarily to this high end would be of great value; but an influence drawing men steadily and powerfully in this direction must be set down among the chief motive forces of religion.

Such revelation is. Its touch communicates life to religion. Whatever any one may hold as to revelation, whether he believes in it or rejects it, he must concede that the effect of it in the world and on religion has been continuously powerful. It is in connection with what is believed to be a revelation from God that religion has its career as an institution in our world; and its organized forces, its conquests, and its mighty influence are all historically associated with revelation. Not only is this true of the Christian religion; it is the fact in nearly the same measure with the other great religions of mankind. All have received the quickening and impetus which instituted them and gave them at once diffusive energy and authority, from a real or im-

agined disclosure of the Divine will. Whether a strictly natural religion could develop the motive-power to organize and extend and perpetuate itself, we have no means of knowing, because we have no example of anything of the kind.¹

2. The philosophy of the effect of revelation on religion is not obscure. It is wholly rational and explicable. The truth which revelation affirms is the truth which the human spirit prophesies. That God is, and that there is another and more permanent realm than this with which we are in contact by our senses, is the prepossession of the soul. To this prepossession the action of the understanding on the facts, principles, and processes of nature, ministers. Only one thing is wanting to kindle this deep prepossession

¹ The only exception to this remark which would be likely to occur to any one is, we judge, the religion of the Chinese, or that part of their religion derived from Confucius. Whether this constitutes a real exception depends on the definition that should be given to the word "religion," as well as upon a due consideration of all the elements that enter into the great religio-ethical system of the Chinese sage. If it should be considered an exception to the rule stated above, it will not be found to be more so than the Chinese are among the races of mankind.

into enthusiastic faith; that one thing is the personal tidings from God and the spiritual realm which revelation supplies. As astronomy rises up triumphant, a new science and a new power in the world, from the moment the telescope begins to verify the predictions of the astronomer by revealing the orb he had located by calculation, so religion, reinforced by revelation, takes on new life, feels the spring of fresh energy, goes forth in the assurance of victory to the conquest of the nations. Revelation not only satisfies a reasonable demand of the intellect: it inspires the soul. It is the Divine touch, at which humanity thrills and rises to newness of life. Historically, revelation has been like the coming of spring to the seed-germs: it has started into high and continuous activity the moral energies of man.

3. Descending from these more general ends to which revelation contributes, we may observe others that are special. As a free being it devolves on man to determine what shall be the aim of his life. He is possessed of energies: what use shall he make of them? He is gifted with powers: in what directions

shall he guide their activity? The answer to these questions waits on the answer to another. Who and what is he? He will answer those inquiries according to the idea he has of his own rank in the scale of being. If he takes himself to be an animal merely, — with an intellectual attachment, perhaps, but still essentially and finally an animal, — he will solve the question as to the aim of life and the use of his powers in one way: he will be apt to adopt the ancient formula, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." If he takes himself to be a child of God, heir of immortality, and capable of indefinite expansion in knowledge and goodness, he will answer the question in another and quite different way. For it all hinges on what he really is, — on his rank in the scale of being. He can set his sails for this port or that. His value to himself and to the world depends on whether he sets them for this port or that.

It is apparent at once that the whole aspect of a man's life is changed by the proper answer to this profoundly interesting and supremely important inquiry. Indeed, the most

subtle and destructive enemy of high endeavor is the doubt that lurks in so many minds, whether, after all, their destiny is not to lie down with the brutes at last, in a common utter extinction. Doubt is what damns men. If none of us ever doubted that God is, as really as we are; that our being is linked to His; and that we are, therefore, shut up to a final necessity of seeking our good and joy in that which is good in His sight,—none of us would ever swerve far from rectitude. It is our distrust of this glorious and saving truth that hands us over to the service of evil. Anything, therefore, however disagreeable or painful, that awakens us to the eternal fact, and keeps vigilant in us the consciousness of our Divine birthright, is an unspeakable blessing. Sorrow, disappointment, loss, are, indeed, sanctified as well as justified, if they have the effect to break the fetters of sense and set the spirit free.

But there is a more excellent way. It should not be necessary that we be stripped of earthly goods and scourged, in order that we become alive to heavenly joy. Access of worldly properties and honors ought not to

dull the soul's sensibility. On the contrary, growth in power and means and influence should stimulate the inner and true life of the spirit. It would, if the conviction of the reality, and hence of the transcendent superiority, of spiritual things were present with us from the beginning. But too often, too uniformly, this conviction, instead of arming and guarding us from the first, is among the last resources we acquire.

4. Revelation answers the important inquiry by assuring man that there is a permanent part of him, and that it is spirit. His rank is determined by his origin, as the rank of every being is. Origin concludes nature and destiny. So much of man as had its origin in dust must return to dust. If that is the whole story as to his origin, that also is the whole story as to his destiny. In affirming the super-physical and divine origin of man revelation touches the precise spring that vibrates to moral truth and immortal hope. The facts are not changed; man is no more than before. But the fact is certified, and the spirit within leaps in recognizing response to the spirit without.

5. The manner in which this end is accomplished can only be hinted here. Consider that the common trait of revealed religion is a complement of organized instrumentalities for worship and for work. Consider the educating influence of the services and symbols, declaring the majesty and authority of the Eternal and proclaiming the spiritual kinship of man with God. Regularly and almost daily the eye receives the impressive lesson and passes it on to the mind. Our worship is often described as "barren;" and so it is. Yet, should we take from it all that appeals to eye and ear—to the senses—and all that is addressed to the social nature and the sentiment of beauty, we should have a new perception of the meaning of the word "barren." So much does even our severe simplicity of worship yet depend on external impressions. But in the earlier day this vast resource was used in a degree that seems to us now childish. Rather it was adapted to childhood; it was the wise means employed by the Author of religion to print its eternal facts deep into the consciousness of the race.

6. If mankind were fully enlightened, and

could be depended on to be perfectly self-consistent, we should calculate that having determined their rank in the creation, and seen the ends to which their style of being points, they would be found unanimously pursuing the appointed path of life. But if there is one thing in regard to which we may be entirely certain, it is that men are not agreed in following out the ends contemplated in their nature. If it is allowable to say that they all desire one thing ultimately, as happiness, it does not admit of dispute that they go many ways — frequently opposite ways — to attain it. Ignorance of what is best for them lies at the root of most of the folly displayed in this particular. It may be contended with much force that men know better than they do; that it is their conceit of their own wisdom, allied with a large human element of pure perversity, that is at fault; and that the remainder may be explained by the inveterate preference of the average mortal for darkness to light.

This is a plausible indictment, certainly; but it is hardly judicial. When, in one of our heated political campaigns, we find the journals and orators of each of the great political parties

charging that the other party is actuated at bottom by base motives, and that the membership of the other party — comprising one half the people of the country — are really bent on bringing down around their heads the goodly fabric of free government, we make the necessary deductions and allowances for partisan inflammation and the exigencies of the campaign. As matter of fact, most of the people on both sides are patriotic and equally desirous of advancing themselves and their country in prosperity and honor. It is much the same with the question before us. In our haste we accuse our fellow-men of utter depravity and perversity. We say they know better; that they are bent on wrong, and only satisfied with iniquity. But in our sober moods we do not frame an indictment that sweeps ourselves, along with condemned humanity, into the criminal's dock. We discriminate and we try to be just; and we say that lack of enlightenment, mistake as to true well-being, inability to perceive the real ends of human existence, and a sad incapacity to appreciate and enjoy the higher range of motive and activity, are the explanation of an incalculable amount of wrong-doing and low living.

In this mood we study carefully the springs of human conduct, and come presently to a settled conviction that we can never expect to have a really good world until we can get into men's minds a luminous idea of what goodness is. The life of any nation, of any family, of almost any individual, is a translation of the conceptions of the nation, family, or individual. As an author can put no more complete and exact "system" of any subject — philosophy, ethics, theology, astronomy — into his book than exists already in his mind, so it is not rational to expect a type of life from any portion of mankind higher than the ideas of life which that portion of mankind entertains. All efforts to improve any class will be futile, or at best will result in a merely transient change of habit, unless their minds are opened and elevated so as to admit truer and loftier conceptions.

7. Now revelation indicates its divine mission to men at just this point of need. It teaches them what their real good is, on the authority of Him who created them and who therefore knows. The various and conflicting opinions they have on that subject are an obviously unsafe guide. If they could have just what they most need,

and what in their sanest moments they most ardently desire, it would be an authoritative statement of what is best for them. This is what revelation furnishes. In both Testaments of our Bible this inquiry of the sincere soul is met by a complete and final answer. In the Old Testament it is cast in ever memorable words: "What doth the Lord require of thee, O man, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" Different in phrase, but identical in import, is that other noble sentiment of the wise king: "Fear God and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man." He who will hearken unto the word of the Lord has no longer any excuse for stumbling. He who will not hearken is as certainly without excuse; for he not only sins *in* the light but *against* the light.

In the New Testament the answer is still more complete and unequivocal. That record teaches that sin is death; that righteousness is life and peace; that the worth of a man consists not in his talents nor in his accumulations, but in his virtue; and that human happiness is always commensurate with human goodness. Or, to state the same great New-Testament truth in

different terms, man was made to be saved.¹ It is self-evident that the best thing for him is to attain that for which he was made. The meaning of the mission of Jesus is comprised in these two facts: (1) that sinful men are perishing men; (2) that they cannot be depended on to lift themselves out of sin, and consequent wretchedness, without Divine help. We submit the Sermon on the Mount, the Parable of the Prodigal Son, the Epistle to the Romans,—we might almost say the entire New Testament,—in support of these propositions.

8. Unfortunately, it does not follow that men will do what is best for them when they have learned, on Divine authority, what that is. The teacher of morals and the preacher of religion

¹ For the benefit of such readers as may not have the opportunity to see the other Manuals of Doctrine and Duty in this series, we may remark here that in the Universalist view salvation is moral perfection. This is what man was made for; this is what Jesus Christ came to insure to him. It is an attainment with which times and places have nothing to do, except that every attainment occurs at some time and in some place. Every act or acquisition which contributes to our moral improvement enters into the process of our salvation. Jesus Christ is pre-eminently our Saviour because he extends to us, in its fullest measure and in its purest form, the help we require in the most critical crises of our struggle. He is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end of our victory.

encounter here their most discouraging repulse. When they have made it clear that men are the children of God, and have pointed out the range of motive and ambition which such a noble lineage implies, they naturally look to see an immediate elevation of the whole purpose of life. Man is a reasoning being; he ought also to be a reasonable being. If he were, it would be almost a matter of mathematical calculation that, having been shown his real and lofty place in the scale of creation, he would be urged by an irresistible impulse to be worthy of it. But this reasonable expectation is too generally doomed to disappointment. In one of his quaint and powerful sermons, Thomas Whittemore describes an interview with the deacon of a Baptist Church. The deacon professed that he could be a Universalist if any passage of Scripture were shown him declaring unequivocally that the mission of Jesus extends to men after death. Mr. Whittemore quoted several grand declarations which he believed involved that conclusion; "but the deacon shook his head." Finally Mr. Whittemore came to Romans xiv. 7-11, which he recited slowly and with triumphant emphasis. Said Mr. Whittemore, "I looked to see him spring from

the floor; but he did not." The case seemed clear to the teacher; the pupil's mind was yet enveloped in the cloud of long-growing associations. It would take time and renewed dispensations of light to lead him out into open day.

It is the same in every department of moral or religious progress. Few persons advance to new and higher ground at a bound. Gradually the mind opens, slowly old ties and associations are unknit, and with hesitation and alternations of progress and retreat most men go forward. It is not wonderful that so large a per cent of the converts of religion go back to their former life, or that so many of those who, in a season of temperance revival take the pledge, fall away shortly afterward. The cords of custom are tough, the bias of evil and of ignorance is not soon overcome.

So it comes to pass that neither the knowledge what their rank is among the creations of God, nor what is best for them, induces men generally to forsake a low plane of life or to enter earnestly on broader and better ways. We must reckon with depravity, a narrow mind, pitiful weakness, vanity, and wilfulness. Many know the right and still the wrong pursue. At

this hardest and most hopeless point in the task of the reformer, revelation comes to his aid. The Christian revelation, of which we here particularly speak, has, as its crowning excellence, the power to inspire men with good desire. It is able to beget within them the impulse to righteousness, — to start them on the highway of purity and goodness. Note how this is accomplished.

9. The law is that the power which propels a human soul along the path of the higher life must be begotten in the soul. Wherever else it may have originated, it is not motive-power to the spirit of man until it springs up within. Sometimes, and with some natures, a clear perception of the situation incites this inward impulse; but with more it does not. They see that they belong to God, and by virtue of that relation are bound to render Him their loyalty and love. But they feel no deep desire within, urging them to rise and rush into their Father's waiting arms. To conclude and consummate all other help, therefore, men require to have *motive-power generated within them*. To this demand the Christian revelation answers by its *personal forces*. For the form of this revelation is not

documentary, nor statutory, nor dogmatic: it is a revelation in a person,—Jesus, the Christ. If the person possess sufficient moral power the problem is solved.

10. Without stopping to discuss here any of the questions raised over the nature, rank, or offices of Jesus, we may anticipate nearly unanimous agreement with us in the statement that he has proved, in the trial of eighteen centuries, the most potent inspirer of moral life and energy, in souls before dormant or dead, the world has known. In the plan of God souls are used to quicken souls. To name the epoch-makers of history is to prove this,—Abraham, Moses, David, Paul, Plato, Confucius, Buddha, Mohammed, Augustine, Savonarola, Luther. These were mighty souls, luminous and instinct with truth, so that their touch gave light and life to other souls. They have ruled the world from invisible thrones, because at bottom it is a spiritual world, and they were spiritual sovereigns.

But Jesus easily transcends them all. Wherever his spirit touches another spirit, something is communicated. No one who has ever known Jesus can be quite the same that he was before. There is access of a new power, the undying

charm of a new grace. Somehow this man finds that chord in the human soul which, once thrilled, never ceases to vibrate. The witnesses to this fact are as often those who deny his supernatural claims as those who assert them. Robert Elsmere supposed he had found a way of being religious without being a believer in anything supernatural. He emptied himself of what have usually been regarded as the essential contents of Christianity. What did he then do? He filled up the void with love and reverence and imitation — a sort of worship — of Jesus. To inspire others to practise self-denial, courage, and gentleness, he must himself first be inspired. There was no source in all the world, in all the company of the great and good, to which he could turn for personal inspiration, save to the Son of Man, whom he refused to recognize as also Son of God. The testimony alike of those who adore him and of those who would dis-crown him supports the memorable confession of Peter: "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou only hast the words of eternal life."

The conclusion seems not unwarranted, that the Christian revelation is essential to the best development and truest happiness of man-

kind. We may at least claim that these ends are not attained without its powerful aid; nor can we see how they could be without that or something equivalent. We must not commit the fallacy of confounding *desire* with *need*. The value of a thing in the markets of the world is determined by the desire men have for it. But in the higher departments of knowledge and morals and religion, the value of a thing cannot be left to that decision. Frequently, there is only scant indication of a desire for the things of most real value. Those who show the least appreciation of the school are uniformly those who would be most benefited by cultivating its acquaintance. The boor flouts instruction in manners; but he needs nothing else so imperatively. The partisan politician never wearies in his gibes, though he often exhausts his wit, at the political reformer. But it is plain enough that he needs most what he most derides.

So, when we have shown that the Christian revelation supplies what all human beings require for their perfection and peace, it must not be thought a pertinent answer to say, "But men do not seem to *desire* this good

overmuch." This may be true or not true; but if it were the fact that the desire for Christianity has to be created, or at least educated, that would not disprove that it is the chief good of man. We incline to think, however, that the "natural aversion" of men to the Gospel has been much exaggerated. Most of the repugnance to the religion of Christ is recoil from the irrational and dreadful dogmas that have to so large an extent usurped its name. But the truth on which we wish to fix the reader's mind here is that in all his higher interests man "needs a teacher to admonish him." We do not send out missionaries to persuade men to plant and reap, to buy and sell and get gain, to delve in the mine and sail the sea, to eat, drink, and be merry; for they are eager enough to secure all these forms of good. It is otherwise with regard to the durable riches of righteousness. We *do* send out missionaries to persuade men to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and to clothe themselves with those garments of grace which never wax old; because, while these are concerns of the highest and most abiding

importance, we know from long and painful experience that they are not pursued by men generally with either alacrity or enthusiasm.

It is the peculiar and abiding excellence of revealed religion, that it develops for itself the spirit and the instrumentalities which press its benefits on the attention of those who need them. Christianity is often described as "the missionary religion." This is its spirit. It cannot confine its good to its present circle of beneficiaries. It flows out to others; it knocks at all doors; it offers to share its light and blessing with all mankind. Once a soul is infected with its divine contagion, he longs and burns to communicate the unspeakable rapture.

Now this spirit begets its needful and appropriate form. The Gospel does not waste its sweetness on the desert air; it grows an organism—a Church. This is "the body" it requires to make it a serviceable thing to mankind. Without becoming instituted and taking its place as a working force among the other institutions of our world, Christianity could accomplish little. But organized and supplied with the instruments of a varied and

practical service, it at once takes its place among the great forces of the world, with which society and government must reckon, and lays its mighty hand on every interest and enterprise of mankind. And organization is its law as freedom is its life. If, therefore, Christianity be administered with any intelligent comprehension of its genius, it is sure to be an aggressive religion. Such it has proved itself to be under every variety of polity. This was its character in the earliest period of its activity, before schism appeared; this continued to be its strong trait when it was rent with faction and convulsed with controversies; this spirit reappeared as the predominant impulse in the Reformation; and it marks every branch of the Church, east or west, Catholic or Protestant, in the whole of the modern era. In this is at once the hope of the Church and of the world. Our religion will not rest until it has established righteousness in the earth, and the isles wait for its law.

X. — THEOSOPHY AND REVELATION.

In every age since Plato, and in India before his time, there have been persons who

have professed a peculiar wisdom in Divine things. In some cases the knowledge has been supposed to be due to a secret, at first imparted from God, or from the gods, and piously preserved and handed down through a chosen body of men, like the Egyptian priests. The ancient theurgy seems to have been of this type. In other instances the knowledge of God and of the invisible realms was imagined to be accessible by means of a long series of physical exercises, sometimes accompanied with chantings or wailings. A more refined type of theosophy was that of the Egyptian Platonists, and of various modern sects, both in Asia and in Europe, who hold that intercourse with God is possible to the devout and meditative "in every nation under the whole heaven." To this has often been joined the idea of communication with other spiritual beings. The student of the subject is surprised to find that there has been no people so rude, no age so sensual, no class so cultivated, as not to have representatives among the Pyrrhonists, or theurgists, or mystics, or theosophists, or seers. Although the Christian Church has been supplied with the

records of a special revelation, and has professed to build both its organization and its doctrines on the Scriptures, persons, parties, and even sects, have arisen in it from time to time, who, like Miguel Molinos, like Swedenborg, like Madame Guyon and the Quietists, have taught that there is still an open way, by spiritual contemplation, to direct personal knowledge of God and spiritual things.

1. It is easy to scoff at this, and wave it one side under the stigma of fanaticism. But there is a truth at the heart of these phenomena. God is; men are the children of God, bearing His image. To know God is the eternal quest of the human soul. Moreover, He cannot be far from any one of us, since in Him we live and move and have our being. There is no reason, therefore, to question, but every reason in sound philosophy to believe, that the human spirit may put itself in such relations with the Divine spirit as to be conscious of God. This is the truth in theosophy, in mysticism, in quietism. The same truth has been apprehended by pious souls in every branch of the Church, and is stored up in the devotional literature of all the sects.

It is a precious truth. The Christian teacher or preacher has no call to antagonize it. On the contrary, he should recognize it and rest in it as one of the great spiritual facts underlying all religion.

2. In the means used to attain this spiritual illumination lies the secret of personal faith in God and lurks the danger of religious delusion. By prayer, by contemplation, by long and assiduous cultivation of the power of spiritual discernment, does the spirit's eye open on the "things of God." There is no other means of awaking to spiritual consciousness and remaining awake. But experience proves that not every person can engage in this work of abstraction from the world of our physical abode and penetration into the more real world of the spirit, without loss of his firm footing as an earthly pilgrim. It is essential to our usefulness here that we should preserve a solid hold on the material world; it is just as essential that we should learn how to discern spiritual things. The natural and the spiritual are parts of one whole. The eye that is closed to either sees only half the truth. But as an exclusive pur-

suit of earthly good distorts the moral vision and disfigures the moral symmetry of a man, so absorption in the search after God and the unseen tends to disturb the natural play of the perceptions, and imports into the field of sense measures and standards which cannot be used. It is for this reason that theosophists, in India or in America, enjoy the reputation of people who are striving

“To wind themselves too high
For mortal man beneath the sky.”

3. The greater sobriety and practical usefulness of those who rest in the doctrine of a revelation made through chosen oracles at appointed epochs hints the truth that as every man cannot be his own astronomer, so it is not expected that every man shall be his own seer. There may be no decree of nature or God that prohibits any man from becoming an astronomer; but it is not practicable for every one to perfect himself in that science. So there may be no ordinance of God against every man's inquiring into the deep things of the Spirit and becoming at length as sure of them as he ever was of the natural earth and sky; but it is practically impossible to a useful

citizen of this world. The daily welfare of mankind is as truly subserved by a special revelation as are the higher interests of the soul. We need have no quarrel with any seer, real or alleged, ancient or modern. What he asserts is confirmation of what we teach; but for the purposes of our present state of being we can say to our fellows generally, if not to him, "Yet show we unto you a more excellent way."

XI. — INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE.

The subject of the interpretation of the Scriptures is too large to enter upon in detail in a brief survey like this. The principles involved in rational and reverent exegesis have been implied in the account already given of the Bible and of the different theories of the mode of its production. To make our summary of revelation complete, however, it is necessary to add here a word directly on the interpretation of Scripture.

1. The same principles which a competent and fair-minded scholar would apply in the interpretation of any ancient book, produced in a foreign clime and among peoples no longer

maintaining a national existence, should be applied to the study of the Bible. Its language, its history, its customs, its characters must be studied as these are in secular literature. The philology and grammar, and the entire critical apparatus of a Biblical student differ in no essential respect from those employed by the student of the Vedas or of Homer. That is, in both instances he would wish to know the places and the persons and the circumstances as accurately as the best means now existing will permit, as an indispensable condition of understanding the written record; and he would use the accepted principles of the language as modified by this particular author in determining the meaning of any passage.

2. The meaning of the Bible is the Bible. The interpreter gets all the light from history, biography, political institutions, social and tribal customs, habits of thought, peculiarities of language, usage of the author, that it is possible to obtain, not to draw a desired meaning out of the text, but to gain its true meaning. The question he continually asks himself is, What did the writer or speaker

mean here? In this inquiry he does not concern himself with the truth or falseness of the thing expressed: he asks only for its precise and full meaning. Reconciliations may be demanded afterwards: they are not to be thought of now.

3. Having determined the meaning of Holy Scripture, the interpreter has concluded his task. On the basis of the true meaning the Christian teacher, preacher, or theologian may determine doctrines, build systems, enforce duties. These should be either directly taught by the language of the Scriptures, or legitimately deduced from the unquestioned meaning. The practice has been, to no small extent, to construct a theological system, draw out a scheme of doctrines in harmony with the system, and then proceed to "interpret" Scripture so as to make it contain the system and teach the doctrines. This is the reverse of the true method. If we have faith in the Bible we shall show it, not by construing it to support our preconceived opinions, but by forming our opinions on the model of its teachings.

4. It must not be inferred from the array

of critical appliances mentioned, and the tools of knowledge said to be used by the exegete, that only the vastly and variously learned can understand the Bible. It is not the scholar's but the people's book. The greater part of it is readily intelligible to the uneducated. Indeed, if no bias is in the mind of the reader, and he reads to understand, as he would history, poetry, precept elsewhere, there will be but small liability of misapprehension. In respect of all the more vital facts and instructions this is particularly true. Yet, as the Bible was recorded originally in languages with which scholars only are now familiar, and as its whole wonderful history and its minutest particles have been subjected to the closest scrutiny by generations of Biblical specialists, the wise student of this most marvelous of books will not commit himself to an opinion in regard to any obscure matter until he has aided his own insight by the fuller and more exact knowledge of the learned; while in regard to great and weighty doctrines affecting the faith and life, or questions of moment which are also matters of controversy, it would be natural that he should feel stronger

if his own views were supported by the consensus of scholarship.

XII. — AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE.

Closely related to the question of the interpretation is the question of the authority of Scripture. The *post-Reformation* divines occupied a position in regard to this subject which it must be confessed gave them great advantage over their less rigorous successors. They held to the complete verbal inspiration of the books of the Bible. As every jot and tittle was the word of God equally with the weightiest deliverance of Jesus, the question of authority was very simple. Any declaration of Scripture, and every declaration, must command instant respect and require unquestioning obedience. As matter of fact it may be doubted whether more persons received the word with reverence or heeded it with alacrity. But the theory was simple, easily expounded, and quickly understood. The reasonable view, which we have presented in these pages, does not admit of so simple application. It requires us to take account of

“the human element” in the Bible, of historical and biographical errors, of discrepancies of fact, of mistaken opinions, as well as of poetry, tradition, and the sayings of uninspired and wicked men, that sprinkle the record.

1. What authority, it may be asked, can such a book claim; and what authority is it fitted to command? We do not pretend to be able to give a direct and unqualified answer to this inquiry. The most we can safely and sincerely say, is, that we have never met a case of actual difficulty,—a case, that is, where some one wished to know what degree of authority should be accorded a given passage of Scripture, but could not ascertain. In all practical exigencies we believe the answer is clear and satisfying. The instructions of Christ, the reasonings of Paul, the “thus saith Jehovah” of Isaiah, are generally plain enough; and every rational and reverent soul feels that they are of different degrees of authority. If in respect of these and similar portions of the record, which are obviously of the highest value, there is no practical difficulty in determining the relative degree of imperativeness, how much more readily will

the imagined obstacles disappear in the case of the Chronicles, Esther, and the Apocalypse!

2. But the inquirer may wish to know whether any portion of the record is of absolute authority; and if so, what is the test for determining it. We should answer to the first part of the question: Yes, large portions of the Bible are of absolute authority, and the Bible as a whole is of such authority; that is, a man has no right to believe or teach religious doctrines not found in the Bible; and contrariwise he has a right to believe and do what the Bible as a whole clearly sanctions.

To the second part of the question we should reply, The test must be found in these three things: (1) Is the teaching the undoubted word of the Lord, or of Jesus Christ, or of an apostle, or of some other inspired teacher? (2) Does it commend itself to the reason and the moral sense? (3) Does it vindicate and verify itself as the truth of God by proving, on trial, to be for the highest good of men? It may not be possible to apply all of these: it will in most cases be practicable to apply two of them; and a degree of

authority which no right-minded person will venture to disregard must be accorded to any Scripture that abides one of these tests.

3. It is to be distinctly recognized that the claim to authority over human opinion and conduct of any alleged revelation must submit to review and decision by the human faculties. If we accept the authority, as much as when we reject it, we do so by the use of the only instruments we possess for reaching a conclusion on any subject. There is, therefore, not only no prohibition of the use of our reason on the problems of revelation, there is a distinct command, announced in our constitution, to use this prerogative. It is quite true that we may mistake; but there is no help for it. Our consolation is in the certainty that we should more grievously mistake, and inexcusably too, if we attempted to decide so grave a matter without reason.

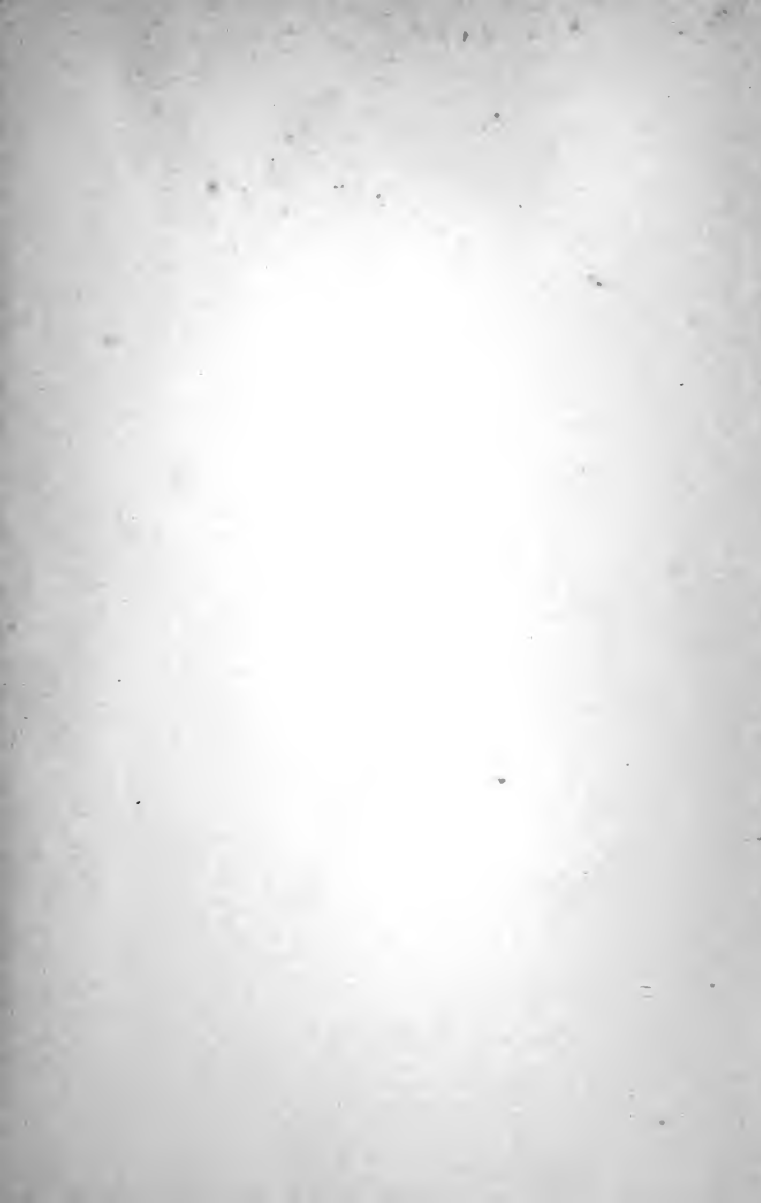
XIII. — CONCLUSION.

We have endeavored to show what revelation in general includes, and to set forth, without using technical language, what sound and reverent scholarship authorizes us to hold

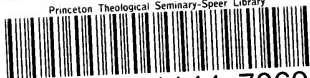
as the truth concerning the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. We have been obliged to omit much more relating to our subject than we have found room for. Our judgment is that we have selected that which is most relevant, timely, and important. The greatness of the theme, its transcendent interest, and the vastness of the material, impress us powerfully with the smallness of our achievement. But it has been a high satisfaction to snatch a few hours from a crowded round of daily duties, to commend anew, and in the fair outlines supplied by modern knowledge, a Book that is the choicest literary inheritance of the human race, unequalled as a storehouse of the wisdom that comes from above, and without a rival in the beneficent influence it exerts over the mixed scene of earthly sorrow, sin, and joy.







Princeton Theological Seminary-Speer Library



1 1012 01144 7069



