

SUGGESTIONS
TO THE
THEOLOGICAL STUDENT.

BY
A. C. TAIT, LL.D.

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SUGGESTIONS

OFFERED TO THE THEOLOGICAL STUDENT,
UNDER PRESENT DIFFICULTIES.

FIVE DISCOURSES

PREACHED BEFORE THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD.

BY A. C. TAIT, D.C.L.,

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P R E F A C E.

It is stated in one of the following Sermons, that there is a mixture of truth in every attractive error; and that, therefore, none can successfully meet such error except those who understand, and are willing to appreciate, the truth which is mixed up with it. If a man would persuade others not to be Romanists, he must know what the truths are on which the strength of Romanism is built: if he would persuade them not to adopt what is commonly, vaguely enough, called Rationalism, he must have some acquaintance (the deeper the better) with the literature and habits of thought prevalent in that country to which the system owes its birth. This seems to be a mere truism. Yet so strange

are the prejudices which sway even intelligent and good men, that a very general impression seems to prevail amongst English Divines, that the very fact of a writer's showing any acquaintance with the theology of Germany may be taken as an *à priori* indication of unsoundness. There are of course very few who would have the boldness to confess that they entertain so unreasonable an opinion; but they who act on this opinion are certainly not few, and very serious evil may, before we are aware, be thus done to our Church: for certainly it is not impossible that young and ardent minds may be driven, almost against their will, to look with too much sympathy upon errors with which they find themselves unjustly charged.

It is scarcely more than might be expected from this prejudice if some English writers, who draw many good thoughts from the Protestant divines of the Continent, seem not unnaturally to have become unwilling to refer more

than is absolutely necessary to the sources to which they are indebted.

The author of the present volume is deeply sensible of the very limited range of his own acquaintance with the Divines who are thus looked upon with suspicion ; but he has thought it a duty, in order to protest against this prejudice, as well as for other reasons, to refer distinctly to the few of whose assistance he has availed himself. For it is of much importance that English readers, if they do not know it already, should learn that Germany has to boast of writers in almost every department of theology, who unite the deepest learning with a sound and earnest Christian faith ; and that it is to such writers we shall mainly be indebted, if the Infidelity which is commonly associated with the name of their country be smitten and overthrown. It is indeed much to be deprecated that these writers should become directly the guides of the English mind.

They have their German peculiarities; and their whole mode of treating subjects is affected by the controversies which are around them in their own land. What is wanted to meet Infidelity in this country is an English theology, which, fully alive to the peculiar excellencies of our great national Divines, shall thankfully avail itself of the labours of foreigners, while it is still, essentially, our own.

And now a very few words seem required to explain the connection and bearing of the following Sermons. Shortly after the author was appointed to the office of Select Preacher, and before he had entered on his duties, it seemed probable to many well acquainted with the feelings prevalent in Oxford, that great changes would soon occur in the theological atmosphere of the place. Symptoms were not wanting to indicate, that the opinions which had been for some years dominant were about to disappear almost as rapidly as they had sprung up; while nothing was

so likely to give them for a time a lingering hold over the public mind, as those injudicious attempts which are often made to destroy error by mere protest, without any efforts to substitute a better system in its room. Subsequent events have certainly confirmed the impression that such a change was approaching, as the erroneous system alluded to has now, by the publication of Mr. Newman's Essay, received its death-blow from the very hand to which it owed its creation.

The question then naturally occurred, what ought to be done to guide the minds of younger students amid that shaking of all opinions which was likely to follow. It seemed that the great object ought to be, to direct attention to some intelligible, enlightened, and well-grounded Protestant system, which might, by the blessing of God's Spirit, recal men's minds to the simplicity of the Gospel, and enable them to take their stand

on the theology of the New Testament, amid the ruins of that baseless traditional teaching which was crumbling around them.

To effect this, however, must be the work of time, and is the great duty of those to whom at this trying juncture the University entrusts the task of conducting its daily instructions, and moulding the minds of the young, through personal intercourse, both by precept and example.

Meanwhile it became obvious, that, as the transition-state is always one of great anxiety, there could be little doubt of the particular very alarming direction in which thoughtful minds would be not unlikely at present to hurry, in escaping from the system which they had learned to distrust. The teaching of the last ten years had entirely unsettled men's minds ; and it was certain that they could not quietly return to the old channels. A thousand new thoughts had been suggested to them. New fields of theological inquiry lay enticingly

open on every side. It might indeed be hoped that such works as Mr. Trench's Notes on the Parables, and his subsequently published Notes on the Miracles, uniting, as they seem to do, so earnest a zeal for faithful religion to an inquiring spirit acquainted with the wants and longings of an intellectual age, would tend to give a safe direction to the inquiries on which so many had entered. But no one could doubt that the prospect was full of danger; and that every man who thought he understood the temptations to which his younger brethren were exposed, was bound to use all his influence, if perchance he might benefit them.

The intention of these Sermons then has been, in connection with the present tendency of men's minds, to offer some few suggestions which have occurred only at spare moments in the midst of the claims of a laborious practical occupation; but which it is still hoped may possibly be of

use in showing the spirit in which speculative error ought to be met. The object of their publication will be gained if they shall be found to have lent any assistance, however slight, to the efforts of those few leading spirits who unite an understanding of the present state of feeling in the rising generation of our divines to a real knowledge of that attractive theology which, coming from the early seat of the Reformation, seems likely for good or for evil, so deeply to affect the highest interests of our own Church; and who sanctify their acuteness and learning by an earnest love of Gospel truth. Humanly speaking, it is only to such men, if perchance they may be found among us, that we can look with any confidence as fitted to be the guides of an inquiring age.

SCHOOL-HOUSE, RUGBY,
23rd April, 1846.

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DISCOURSE I.

ST. JOHN'S GOSPEL THE MODEL OF CONTROVERSY.

ST. JOHN XX. 31.

“ These are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name.”

THIS is St. John's own account of the object with which he composed his Gospel. It is doubtful whether we have distinct historical grounds for attributing to him any other motive. The well-known assertion of Irenæus,* that the Apostle was induced to write by his desire to oppose the errors of Cerinthus and the Nicolaitans, has been

* I would refer to Lucke's Commentary (Bonn. 1840), ch. iii., in which is collected the testimony of antiquity on the facts here mentioned. Any reader of Lucke will see how largely throughout this sermon I have availed myself of his suggestions.

repeated by a chain of early authors, but with such slight variations in the name of the prevailing heresy, as seem to endanger the claims of this tradition to any great historical or chronological accuracy. It is well known that Clement of Alexandria, as quoted by Eusebius,* has asserted, that St. John wrote in order to fill up the deficiencies of the other Evangelists, by the publication of a more spiritual gospel. And Eusebius† has recorded his own opinion, that St. John, having this completion of the Gospel-history in view, effected his object chiefly by a detailed account of the events which happened between our Lord's birth and the imprisonment of the Baptist. This opinion of Eusebius is sanctioned by Jerome,‡ but not to the exclusion of the polemical object to which Irenæus points.

Now it will be found on examination, that probably, as has been well observed,§ these several statements rest rather on an exe-

* Euseb. H. E. vi. 14. † Ibid. iii. 24.

‡ De Vir. Illust. 9. § Lucke's Comment. vol. i. p. 189.

getical than on any historical or even traditional basis. I mean that most, if not all of these writers (as is clearly the case with Eusebius) were not so much recording facts which history told them as to the object of St. John, but rather bringing forward conjectures, which they naturally formed for themselves from the study of his Gospel, and from their observation of the uses to which it was obviously capable of being applied.

It is not at all intended that these writers ought not to have formed such conjectures, or that there is any inconsistency between their statements and that of the Apostle himself in our text. When St. John says of his Gospel, that it was written that those to whom it was addressed might "believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing they might have life through His name," he attributes to himself a motive which must equally have influenced the other three Evangelists; for all, in obedience to their Saviour's last command, had

devoted their lives to the salvation of their brethren. It was natural for the early readers of St. John's Gospel, as it is for us, to seek some further explanation of its marked peculiarities. What we have now to note is, that apparently the earliest writers, whatever reference they may at first sight appear to make to certain outward traditions, did in reality in this matter seek rather for the solution of their difficulty in that intelligent examination of the book itself, illustrated by the known history of the times, to which sound biblical criticism has ever pointed as the best guide, when used humbly in dependence on the Spirit of God, for enabling us to understand his word.

If we endeavour then ourselves, aided by the suggestions of those early writers, so to examine St. John's Gospel, that it may as it were speak for itself, and tell us of its object, we shall probably come to the conclusion that this object was threefold. First, It may be doubtful, as a matter of history, whether the Apostle wrote with any distinct

especial reference to the particular heresy of Cerinthus; but heresies like that of Cerinthus he had undoubtedly to oppose. Secondly, He knew that the best way to oppose these heresies was by writing an account of our Lord's life, more distinctly spiritual than the histories of the three Evangelists who had gone before him. And, Thirdly, As the new errors which had arisen had called for a new gospel, it followed, of course, that the points of view from which he was now to survey the history, and the discourses as well as incidents which he must of necessity introduce in illustration of these views, must make his work for the most part supplementary to the writings of his three predecessors.

This account of St. John's threefold object in the composition of his Gospel—uniting the three early opinions into one whole—has at least the merit of giving an obvious explanation of each of its marked peculiarities. I believe, also, that a patient examination of the whole book will confirm

our supposition as to the gradation according to which the members of this threefold object ought to be ranked. The Apostle's main object then is, in the best sense of the word, polemical. His work, being polemical, naturally dwells on those spiritual doctrines which are the true antagonists of the errors he confutes; and the form of a supplementary narrative of the Lord's life and teaching was wisely selected as the best vehicle for confuting erroneous doctrine, by its striking exhibition of positive truth in his heavenly words and deeds.

Taking then this to be the true account of the object of St. John's Gospel, I propose to examine how far the book may be rightly regarded as the Divine model, which the Holy Spirit has given to Christians to direct them in their struggles with erroneous teaching:—

I. First of all let us note, that there was much in the circumstances and character of the beloved Apostle which pointed him out more than his fellow-disciples as the man

best suited to be the champion of truth against these growing errors.

1. St. John must have been acknowledged, even by his opponents, to be more likely than any other Apostle to be well acquainted with the true doctrine of his Master.

It is not of course meant that there is really any ground for drawing distinctions between the different degrees of heavenly illumination with which the Apostles were enlightened; but such distinctions were drawn by heretics at a very early time. To attempt to draw these distinctions is indeed the sure way to shake the foundations of our faith, by raising questions as to the degree of deference which we owe to each inspired authority; while both the sacred writers themselves,* and, more distinctly, the wisest uninspired Christians in all ages, following their example, have regarded the New Testament as one whole, the several parts of which God's providence did from time to time cause to be added to the

* 2 Peter, iii. 15, 16.

already existing canon of the Old Testament, while the new works, as they were successively written, became invested with the same majesty of an unquestioned authority as belonged to the *γράφαι* of the elder time. To these elder scriptures our Lord had most distinctly given his heavenly sanction; and the new writers were even more clearly proved by miracles, than their predecessors of the Old Testament, to form one body, as the others had formed one chain, of inspired teachers accredited from Heaven. The very gulf by which Christ's overruling providence ordained that the body of these teachers should be separated from the holy uninspired men who came immediately after them, will shew, that whatever writer is proved by historical evidence to belong to this Apostolical or canonical body, is to be regarded by all humble Christians with implicit reverence as delivering the oracles of God. And when a man's mind is once satisfied with the historical proof that any writing is a genuine portion of this one

book, he cannot, without sin and danger, draw distinctions of greater or lesser authority between the several members of what God has united, that it may be, not in this or that portion of it, but as one whole, the perpetual record of his will.

But still, necessary as it is to maintain the equally inspired authority of all writers who are proved to be inspired at all, it is certain that, in early as in later times, this principle has been continually neglected. It was not in Corinth alone that men opposed the authority of Cephas to that of Paul; nor is it in our age alone that infidelity has endeavoured to justify itself by the watchword of "not Paul but Jesus." Doubtless there were many of the early heretics who considered that the pure philosophical Christianity, which the Lord Jesus came to promulgate, had been corrupted by the ignorance or prejudice of his followers. But where could such men expect a true account of what the Lord had taught, if not from the Apostle who had been with him in

his secret hours, and whom the Church delighted to honour with the name of his "bosom friend" (ἐπιστήθιος). So that, speaking after the manner of human evidence, we recognise, in St. John's intimate friendship with his Divine Master, the first requisite which he possessed above all other men to be the champion of God's truth. Nor will it, I think, be fanciful to maintain that, even in this point, St. John is our model of controversy, that gospel truth will best be maintained by him who has lived, if we may so speak, in the most intimate society of his now unseen but still present Saviour.

2. Again, the Apostle's time of life pointed him out very naturally as the fittest champion of truth. It is always an evil sign when the young and inexperienced put themselves forward as the leaders of Christ's Church. Now, there is little doubt that the Apostle wrote his Gospel, if not late in his long extended life, at least after he had reached and passed maturity. It is granted that his silence as to the destruction of Jeru-

Jerusalem forbids us to place the date of his Gospel after that event; for it seems impossible that, if the ruin of the old system by the fulfilment of his Lord's prophecies had already come, he could have failed to allude to it. But the testimony of antiquity as to the country in which he composed his work equally forbids us to place the date much earlier. We have the strongest negative evidence from St. Paul's writings, that, so long as he lived, St. John had not yet made the Asiatic province the seat of his labours. Now, St. John could not well have been more than ten years younger than our Lord, and if he wrote his Gospel after St. Paul's death, and near the time of the destruction of Jerusalem, he must have been fast approaching to his sixtieth year. Mature in age as well as holiness, he seemed called both by his apostolic office and his time of life to stand forth and save the younger members of his Master's flock from the grievous errors that destroyed so many of them.

These, however, are only outward circumstances in the Apostle's history. It is better to

note, in the second place, how his own peculiar character fitted him for this warfare.

II. First, St. John was, of course, above all his brethren, the Apostle of love; and, unless controversy be carried on in the spirit of love, it is essentially unchristian. Error may indeed appear to be rooted out by the sword, or without such harshness it may be crushed and borne down by the mere weight of a stern authority, which seeks to overwhelm at once the erring brother and his doctrine. Speaking generally, however, such a mode of warfare will insure no lasting victory. It may silence the adversaries, and spread the solitude which we mistake for peace—it may induce a few to do violence to their convictions, and thus gain for the winning cause the aid of some treacherous waiters upon fortune. But, usually, error checked by force alone will spring up at last only the more vigorously. Heresy, as well as truth, has had its martyrs, and their blood has ever a fertilizing power. Persecution is always ultimately, and, unless it be so

thorough as to shock all feelings of humanity, it is usually, even in the moment of its present triumph, as impolitic as it is unchristian. But St. John's example of love is a practical protest, not against persecution merely, but against all bitterness or violence even of speaking or writing against those who are in error.

Setting aside all question as to the comparative truth or falsehood of the opinions advocated, we cannot fail to be shocked with that bitterness of satire and invective, with which, for example, South assaults the Puritans. Surely, supposing the doctrines thus advocated to be true, they never could be propagated with any benefit to men's souls by such carnal weapons. It is not meant that South is in this matter at all a solitary instance. Doubtless the opposite party retaliated where they could with equal bitterness, and Christ's Church has been disgraced in all ages and countries by the bitter writings of unloving and unsanctified controversy.

To oppose error, except from a love to

Christ and his truth, and the souls of our brethren, is only to be proudly bent on spreading our own opinions. Such opposition to error may in many cases be resolved solely into the love of power, and, taken at the best, it shows nothing better than the proselytizing spirit of the Pharisees, or that which once alarmed the world by the terrible alternative held out by Mahometan aggression. Those who would meet error, as Christ and his Apostles met it, must combat it in St. John's spirit.

The characteristics however of St. John, as the Apostle of love, are by no means so simple as might at first sight be supposed. He was not merely the beloved, but also the loving Apostle; and active love cannot exist at all without earnestness—can never be perfect without a depth and intensity of zeal. The stern severity of the well-known passage in St. John's 2nd Epistle, v, 10, 11 ("If there come any unto you and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed; for he that biddeth

him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds”), as well as the legend of his fleeing from the pollution of Cerinthus, seem but to set forth, somewhat more fully developed, that same element in his character, of which we find plain traces in the history of the Gospels. It is the Apostle of love, of whom St. Luke (ix. 49) and St. Mark (ix. 38) tell us that he was rebuked because, when he saw one casting out devils in his Master’s name, he forbad him, since he would not join the disciples’ company. It was he, with his brother, who would have called down fire from heaven to overwhelm the Samaritan village which refused to admit Christ ;* and this zeal was so prominent a feature as to justify the appellation given to both brethren of “the Sons of Thunder.”† All who have even begun the study of Church history know Clement of Alexandria’s story ‡ of the young disciple rescued from his robber comrades by the aged Apostle’s bold exposure of his life, if by

* Luke ix. 51.

† Mark iii. 17.

‡ Given by Eusebius, H. E. iii. 23.

any means he might win back his convert's soul to the love of Christ. And whether true or merely legendary, this story represents the prevailing belief of the ancient Church, that St. John's predominating love was quickened by as active a zeal for his Master's honour as ever burned in the heart of St. Peter or St. Paul. His was, in fact, the very temper from which the best champions of truth are formed. They love Christ and love him warmly—they are jealous for the honour of that truth of which his Holy Spirit has convinced them—but their love for their fellow-men, even the most sinful, is never swallowed up by zeal : and therefore they plainly show that they seek to win the sinner's soul, even when they denounce his errors with most severity.

The depth of St. John's love was well suited to reclaim. It must at once have enabled him to enter fully into his erring brother's difficulties and peculiar temptations, and thus must have conciliated at the very moment that it opposed ; while the almost

stern earnestness, which at times flashed out from his heart, taught all, that in essential truth he would admit of no indifference; and that, while he would willingly die for those with whom he reasoned, he would not sacrifice to conciliate them one iota of God's real word. Now this last point, his zeal for truth, is the more important to be noted, before we pass on to another, perhaps the most striking of all the characteristics of this Apostle's writings.

2. It has been said that St. John's is the most spiritual Gospel. Certainly St. John's eagle flight does soar directly up to the throne of God, where he gazes on the most mysterious truths which concern the divine essence, and that incomprehensible bond which unites the human soul with the source of its life both spiritual and natural. We need scarcely mention in proof of this the introduction and the manifold discourses. Now we have seen that St. John wrote to confute or dispel error arising from the blending of Christianity with the strange

transcendental philosophy of the East. But mark the mode which he adopts to combat it. It is the statement of a commentator, already often referred to, that "St. John's relation to the Gnosticism of his time is not merely polemical" but in part also what may be called "accommodative." This word "accommodative" may have a suspicious sound; but it is here used in the best sense. This writer means that St. John recognises and fully allows the existence of a true divine *γνωσις*, such as that for which the Eastern philosophy was in vain seeking by mere human means, and through the exaltation of the intellect. It is by dwelling upon, and developing and encouraging men to follow after the true Christian *γνωσις*, that St. John seeks to supply those wants of the more philosophic mind, which led so many, while they professed to be following the simple Gospel, to wander quite away from it amid the misty speculations of heresy or heathenism. Thus he does not meet these errors by mere protest, or denial—by seeking to chain

men's minds down when they wish to soar. He knows, that, as truth is certainly more in itself to be loved than error, so every error into which men fall is only attractive because it bears some resemblance to a truth ; for no one would follow its treacherous glare unless he mistook it for a cheering light which was to refresh and comfort him : and therefore the only way to stop men's mad pursuit of it, is to set before them the true light, not to exhort them to remain contented in the darkness. It may safely be asserted that no heresy ever yet gained any adherents which had not some features of truth to recommend it to man's better nature ; and the attempt to overpower error by mere protest and negation, if it affects men at all, will but make them infidels instead of heretics. It is the worst way of casting out the evil spirit from a man's head or heart, to leave its place empty, swept and garnished, ready for receiving back a more than sevenfold greater plague than that which at first tormented him.

Daily experience proves this. It is true,

both of communities and individuals, that those who have long laboured under the malady of believing too much, do often when cured hurry into the worse malady of believing too little. Superstition is continually replaced by infidelity ; as in like manner infidelity is often replaced by superstition. And this does not arise merely from the fact that unsettled minds have a natural tendency to be continually vibrating from one extreme of error to another, and never resting in the central truth. The evil would seem rather to originate in those injudicious means which are so commonly taken to keep men right.

For first, a man's mind is like a time-piece, which it is in vain to seek to regulate well unless you understand something of its secret mechanism. You may stop the hands violently from without when it goes too fast: but, if you do so, there is great danger that you will never bring it into accord with the true time. For a short period it will go too slow ; and, afterwards, when it has re-

covered the minutes it has lost, it will go too fast again. Thus, no one can hope to free his brethren from religious error, unless he is able to understand and appreciate those secret feelings by which they have been led astray.

And again, when these feelings are discovered, it is vain to seek to cure them by mere thwarting. Christ's religion is no dry unnatural system, which cannot be embraced by our minds till they have been forced into some formal mould contrary to their whole nature. As the Lord Jesus came to save and teach men of all times, countries, and characters, one of the clearest marks that His system is divine, is to be found in its wonderful adaptation to every want of human nature. Each one may find full vent for what still remains of good and noble in his lost heart within the wide circle of Christ's real truth ; and if any, following their natural bent, have hurried into error, there is but one wise course for seeking, by the aid of God's Spirit, to rescue them. The supersti-

tion of an exuberant imagination will never be cured by prosaic arguments on the danger of a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels. The simple credulity of the uninstructed is not to be regulated by sermons upon evidences, nor the daring speculations of a philosophic mind scared by lectures on the temptations of human wisdom, and the blissfulness of ignorance. St. Paul showed, that he, as well as St. John, had a deep conviction of this truth, when "he was made all things to all men, that he might by all means save some." * And a wise uninspired teacher will ever act like these two wise Apostles, first probing deep to find the real secret cause from which error springs, and then seeking to satisfy, by an exhibition of some portion of Christ's truth, those very longings, which, unsatisfied, have, by their vain attempts to gain satisfaction, been the cause of all the error.

Now, it is vain to say that the Gnosticism of the Apostolic age was nothing but un-

* 2 Cor. ix. 22.

mixed error and folly of human wisdom. Like every other heresy it reflected the shadow of many great truths. There is undoubtedly a *λόγος γνώσεως*, which St. Paul classes among the spiritual gifts;* and it was in an ill-directed pursuit of this, that men fell into the *ψευδώνυμος γνῶσις* (science falsely so called)—that *φιλοσοφία καὶ κένη ἀπάτη*, of which St. Paul says that it was according to the tradition of men and the elements of the world, and not, like the true *γνῶσις*, according to Christ.†

St. John then, as we have already said, presents the true *γνῶσις*, as the only effectual antagonist by which the false is to be combated. Men dissatisfied with all the systems of contracted religion which the world presented, were seeking a true philosophic religion suitable for all countries, and free from the restraints which confined it to one sacred time or place. Hear then St. John repeating the Lord's words: "The hour cometh when ye shall neither in this mountain nor yet at

* 2 Cor. xii. 8.

† Col. ii. 8.

Jerusalem worship the Father—The hour cometh and now is when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeketh such to worship him.—God is a spirit, and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth.” *

Again, men who wished to exalt those very debased notions of the Godhead, in which the heathen were sunk, and yet to reconcile the idea of the Almighty's exalted majesty with the belief of some divine superintendence over this lower world, represented the Eternal Father as withdrawn altogether from any direct interference with mankind, and imagined for themselves those successions of emanating spirits, who formed as it were a connecting link between the Father and His universe.† Now, compare St. John's

* John iv. 21, 23.

† The difficulty which gave rise to this doctrine seems well illustrated in the comparison between the Almighty's supremacy and that of the great king, set forth in the 6th ch. of the treatise *περὶ κόσμου*, printed with Aristotle's works, vol. iv. Lips. 1832.

account, in his introduction, of the relation in which the Eternal Word stands, at once to the Father and to us His creatures, thus :—
 “No man hath seen God at any time—the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father ; he hath declared him.”

Again, did philosophers, in their mistaken eagerness to withdraw men’s minds from the things of sight and sense, assert that the human soul was debased by all contact with matter, and that it never could be pure till it had been entirely purged, and had become kindred to the Eternal mind ? Hear our Lord in St. John :—“ Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.—That which is born of the flesh is flesh ; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, ye must be born again.”

Lastly—for this branch of our subject is boundless, and we might go through the whole Gospel in illustration of it—did these men assert that the one object of the soul

throughout our whole life should be, by giving itself to the pursuits of pure intellect to become united with God? Hear again St. John, repeating our Lord's words :—“ If a man love me he will keep my commandments, and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him and make our abode with him.”*

Wherever the Apostle can descry any truth glittering from amidst the mass of error, he turns to it eagerly and strives to purge away the dross that overlays it. He knows that there is in heavenly truth a most attractive power: He knows that, if the minds he has to deal with can only be once taught really to love that truth in its purity, which, in its debased and tarnished state, they are gladly idolising, they will soon come, by the help of Christ's spirit, to prize truth alone, and carefully to separate it from the surrounding mass of erroneous and wicked teaching.

Besides, it ought to be remarked, that there were other heresies to be feared in St. John's

* St. John xiv. 23.

time than that of the mystical Gnosticism. If the statements of history are accurate, the doctrines of the Ebionites were in many respects the very opposite of the Gnosticism of Cerinthus, refusing to recognise the Lord as more than a human teacher, and ever materialising where Cerinthus would have mounted to the sublimest intellectual heights.* Had St. John met his Gnostic antagonists by mere protest and denial, he might have encouraged a low materialising system almost worse than the errors he was opposing; or, at best, another work would have been required, to vindicate the mean of truth. As it is, however, St. John's Gospel allows and appreciates those features in the Gnostic system which were opposed to what was low; thus carefully does he guard his opposition, and as it were indirectly employ one heresy to strengthen resistance to the other.

* Lucke *ibid.* vol. i. p. 213. Cf also Münscher's, *Dogmen-Geschichte* (Cassel, 1832), vol. i. p. 254. Also Mosheim *Hist. Eccl.*, sæc. ii. pars ii. § 3, and sæc. i. pars ii. § 16.

Yet observe, that in all this there is no compromise. The Apostle never forgets, that, though there are glimmerings of truth in the system he directly opposes, the great mass of it is dangerous and fearful error. He is not contented with correcting those false statements with which the true notions were adulterated; insisting, for example, on what the lovers of the false *γνώσις* had forgotten, that the true religious wisdom is united indissolubly with faith—that it is only by active, obedient, loving faith, not by any mere effort of the intellect, that the Inscrutable can be known. Still further, he never hesitates to bring forward, in the most pointed way, those peculiar Doctrines of the Gospel which the Gnostics disallowed. Did they hold our Lord to be but the first of inferior spirits, emanating from God in time? St. John declares distinctly that he was in Himself the Eternal God. Did they hold that matter was essentially all full of evil, incapable of regeneration, and quite abhorrent from the

Divine nature? He asserts, without any qualification, that the Eternal Word became Flesh. Did they reject, as altogether shocking to their notions of the Deity, the possibility of the permanent union of any Divine being with the suffering Jesus? St. John enters into distinct historical details to show how the Eternal Son of God was insulted, crucified, died, and was buried.

So that, on the whole, we come on this point to the conclusion, that St. John's own mind being most naturally inclined to soar to the very heights for which his antagonists were ignorantly longing, the Holy Spirit of God employed him to resist those men by that union of conciliation with kind instruction and bold protest, which was most likely, speaking humanly, with God's assistance, to lead them to the truth.

III. It remains now, lastly, to turn from St. John's circumstances and personal character, to consider briefly the form in which he has made his stand against error.

Plainly, it must be for some wise reason that not one single book of Scripture is written in a directly dogmatical form; and if we ask why this is in the other books, the question occurs still more naturally as to a book written under the peculiar circumstances of St. John's Gospel. It might at first sight appear strange, if dangerous errors were prevailing amongst ourselves, that the answer to them should be, not any directly polemical attack on the arguments of the false teachers, nor any distinctly explanatory statements, like the Apologies of old, of that truth which its antagonists first misrepresented and then denied, but a history of those holy men by whom the truth we love was taught; yet observe, that, with the difference of its being a history of the Lord, and not of any holy men, that lies before us, this is the very form by which the Spirit of God guided St. John to resist error. It is not the distinctive form either of dogmatical or of polemical writing which he adopts, either in this work, or when he

exhorts his beloved converts, by letter, to beware of these same dangerous errors. In the Gospel he gives them history or biography; in the Epistles practical exhortations to a life of holiness: in both cases the form is adopted surely, if we may say so, not without the deepest wisdom.

There might, it is true, be that in the peculiar features of the heresy which St. John opposed, distorting, as it did, and misrepresenting, or explaining away, the facts of our Lord's birth, life, and death, which called for a plain historical statement as its best answer; even as in our own time the heretical or infidel misrepresentations of the "Life of Jesus," have been answered by the great Ecclesiastical Historian of Germany, in a critical and historical narrative of the real facts.*

But there are also other and deeper reasons for St. John's here adopting this form. Who knows not that mere dogmatical statements of Christian doctrine are cold and

* Neander's *Leben Jesu*.

powerless, compared with that spiritual energy with which it becomes invested when set forth in the holy lives and deaths of those whose every act and word embodied it? Surely the real secret of the great influence of what I will not hesitate to call the most truly religious section of our own Church, and of that wonderful progress which their opinions have made in England, from the days when a man was sure to be reckoned a Dissenter or a fanatic for preaching them, is not to be found so much in any learned statements of consistent doctrine, in which these writers are usually regarded as deficient—nor yet in the powerful preaching of many of them—nor yet in that unwearied assiduity in their parish duties, which was long the peculiar characteristic of the whole school; but rather in that silent influence which they gained in every family, as they found their way to the heart in those countless simple histories of holy men, women, and children, who lived and died rejoicing in the great Gospel

doctrines, because they had taught them the love of Christ. Surely, also, Rome's wisdom is well shown in the mode in which she seeks to recommend her follies, by investing them with a holy interest in the lives of saints.

And if such be the influence of the lives of weak, and fallible, and sinful men, what wonder that the Holy Spirit suggested to St. John that no arguments against error, or laboured statements of systematic truth, could ever gain one thousandth part of the influence possessed by a simple narrative of what the Lord Jesus did and said ! What cure for heresy like the thought of that converse which was living in the memories of all who heard it—the impression of which, once received even from the narrative of another, could never be erased from any feeling heart ! Thus did God provide by the writings of St. John, that, to the end of time, if a man, brought up under Christian teaching, be ever tempted by vain speculations to adopt a mere intellectual or low rationalising theory of Christianity, he

may have the thought of its deep spiritual fulness recalled to his heart at once by the mere mention of the names of Nicodemus, and the woman of Samaria, or of the Upper Chamber and Garden in the suburb towards Bethany, where our Lord spake those heavenly chapters which I suppose no earnest man ever read without emotion, which seem able to sustain us under every difficulty, and to give the most vivid realisation of Christ's presence that can be attained in thought on earth, till he comes again bodily and visibly to dwell with us for ever.

And now it only remains very briefly to recapitulate the various points wherein we have seen that St. John's Gospel is the Christian's model. At all times, whenever dangerous error is to be found in Christ's Church (and what age has there ever been in which dangerous error has not abounded?) St. John's example is much wanted. Need we say how much there is in our own age and country which makes it wanted by ourselves? In general, wherever we turn in the world,

we still hear (though less perhaps than two years ago) the most solemn questions made the subjects of idle conversation and argument, even by those who are most unfit to speak of them. I know well that in this place such an evil is less prevalent than elsewhere; for here, thank God, there is too much good feeling to allow us thus thoughtlessly to handle things sacred. But still is the lesson very needful here. As this is the centre of theological teaching for our country, it must ever be also the centre of controversy: and it will be well for us to learn at all times from St. John, the holy and reverent, and loving and prudent Spirit, in which, when compelled, we are to enter upon controversy—holding first, that the chief qualification for it must be a holy life of intimate union with our Saviour—secondly, that without maturity of years and judgment we dare not enter on it—thirdly, that there can be no Christian controversy without Christian love, excited indeed and deepened by an earnest zeal which, in its turn, it softens—fourthly, that we can never meet error

successfully without being able to enter into those feelings in our brother's mind which have led to it, and without being prepared to allow these feelings their full scope and action, so far as they are innocent—and lastly, that no mere arguments will ever have any force, unless they be accompanied by distinct proof, from our own conduct and that of others on our side, that our opinions have been illustrated and enforced by a life of self-denying holiness. May we all (both old and young) remember, that to hurry into controversy without these rules attended to, instead of doing Christ service, is but to perpetuate strife, while we turn his holy Church into a field for our vanity, or pride, or opinionativeness, or at best for the display of an unsanctified zeal which can never save souls.

DISCOURSE II.

VARIETY IN UNITY.*

HEBREWS xiii. 8.

“Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.”

As these words are found in our version, the name of our Lord may seem, to a cursory observer, to stand grammatically in apposition with part of the previous sentence: thus, v. 7, “Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God, whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation:” and then follows our text, seeming to point out what is that end, viz., Jesus Christ, of whom the Apostle seems to predicate, as it were incidentally, that He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. One glance at the

* This Sermon was originally printed separately, as having an immediate interest from the circumstances under which it was preached.

original, however, will show that the passage cannot be taken in this construction. For, first, the words of the text being in the nominative, after the accusative preceding, form an entire sentence or clause by themselves, with the substantive verb in the original understood, “Jesus Christ *is* the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever :” and, secondly, the Greek phrase translated “End of their conversation,” (ἐκβασιν τῆς ἀναστροφῆς,) with which, in our version, the words Jesus Christ seem at first sight to stand in apposition, would be quite inapplicable to our Lord. The only question that remains is, whether the whole clause, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever,” may be taken, as our translators seem to have taken it, as representing the sum and substance of the faith and conversation which is held up as a model : Thus, “Whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation ;” which, we supply, is the doctrine that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. Here the words

ἐκβασιω τῆς ἀναστροφῆς again oppose a difficulty, being scarcely more applicable to the doctrine than to our Lord. With this view of the construction of the clause, it would be better to translate it in the order of the Greek: "Considering the end of whose conversation, follow their faith;" their faith, viz. that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.

But, on the whole, the passage is taken more naturally, according to that interpretation which is sanctioned by Lachmann, and those who with him connect our text, not with the 8th, but with the 10th verse, as the beginning of a new sentence, and as laying down the general principle on which the Apostle is going on to ground his exhortation to a particular duty: Thus, "Whose faith follow, considering the end (or result or termination) of their conversation" (or lives). Then "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever: be not ye therefore carried about by divers and strange doctrines."

Now, it will be obvious that, whichsoever

of these two admissible interpretations is adopted, as showing the true grammatical connexion of the passage, the whole words of our text stand out as a well-known Apostolical maxim. According to the one, they are considered as the sum of Apostolical doctrine, the grand statement that embodies a Christian's faith : according to the other, they are at least the readily-acknowledged general maxim on which the writer is about to build his particular deductions. Taken either way, the whole sentence seems to be brought forward as embodying a statement well known and highly prized throughout the Church.

Viewed in this light, the words, I think, become more solemn and important. They ought to be familiar to us, as to the early Christians. They speak of the true unity which binds together all the scattered portions of Christ's flock. The object of all our worship is one, the one Saviour, unchanging from eternity : and this, steadily kept in mind, will make our worship itself also one, in the only sense in which unity is

of real value. The one Christ will be worshipped in the one acceptable way of a holy self-denying life by all, who, being admitted into His church by the one baptism, are led by the one Spirit, in the hope of the one salvation.

And this unity of a holy purpose will lead much more than any enforced rules of outward uniformity—much more than, till they all try it, men can have any thought of—to the great blessing of perfect unity of belief and practice.

To exhaust this subject, or to trace those thoughts which even a superficial examination of it will suggest, is of course for us here impossible. The point in it to which I would at present direct attention is the following: That this oneness of Jesus Christ, the object of our worship, of which the Apostle speaks, does not exclude that diversity in our modes of conceiving of many of His doctrines, and of serving Him, to which the peculiar circumstances or character of each of us may naturally lead.

God has not made all men alike: He has made the children of His universal family to differ, race from race, nation from nation, individual from individual, by the grand distinctions of blood, climate, country, political state, and disposition; and our Christianity, though one and unchangeable in its essence, must, in outward appearance, vary with our varying circumstances. There is more truth than might at first sight be supposed in the Eastern simile, that, when the Almighty looks down upon the garden of the universe, which He has planted and waters for His pleasure, He is not delighted with that dull monotony which would force all the beds, however different their soils, to yield the same fruits and flowers; but what really pleases Him is to see each exhibiting in its own way the product of that better nature which He has given it, and putting forth in luxuriance its own peculiar riches as an offering in His honour.

Doubtless, this statement has often been so understood as to lead men to suppose

that the Almighty is pleased, not with the thousand varieties of healthful flowers only, but also with noxious weeds, provided they be fresh and vigorous. This is the perversion of the truth which makes men forget that, however various may be the thousand forms of right, there is an immutable and indestructible separation between it and wrong.

But however capable of being perverted—however fruitful actually in producing error, the doctrine I now speak of does, doubtless, like most other principles which have become sources of heresy, point in itself to a great truth, which it was originally intended to express; and this truth is, that the one Saviour will be worshipped, and His doctrines apprehended, in many varying ways, by men of different natural dispositions and in different circumstances, and that to allow room for such varieties is absolutely necessary, if we would have any real unity of heartfelt earnest piety.

Now our text, so far from excluding the idea of this variety in the midst of unity,

seems rather, when fully examined, distinctly to lead us to the acknowledgement of it, by referring us to the true unity as existing in Christ. If any one doubts this, let him consider the sense in which, in the text as elsewhere, the Lord Jesus Christ himself is spoken of as one and unvarying. "He is," the Apostle says, "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever:" yet is there endless variety in the forms in which He is manifested. First, He is the Eternal Word, residing quiescent from the beginning in the bosom of the Father: then He is His Father's active minister, the Creator of the Universe: then He descends as the Angel of the Covenant to watch over the Jews, and gives them the law from Sinai; then He stoops still lower to be born at Bethlehem. He becomes the perfect child; the perfect boy; the perfect man: He is the suffering Saviour in Pilate's judgment-hall, and on the cross: He rises the powerful conqueror; reigns now the intercessor, the gracious Head of the Mediatorial Kingdom,

and at last will be, for all who have despised Him, the inexorable judge.

The same awfully benignant features are doubtless to be traced, whatever be the stage of His existence in which we contemplate His heavenly image; but how endless is the variety of light and shade in which these features are presented to us. Holy minds, led by God's spirit, will not fail, in whatever aspect they view Him, to note those grand characteristics as a Saviour, which make Him one and invariable, the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world; but still they will love to dwell, according to their varying tempers or circumstances, each on different points of all that is revealed of Him. The mind of the religious youth will delight to think of Him as subject to His parents, as seeking instruction like, other youths, in the regular channels, though astonishing all who heard Him by His understanding and His answers; as growing in wisdom as in stature, and in favour with God and man, and patiently

waiting for the good time His Heavenly Father had appointed, before He began openly to announce His message. Again, in vigorous manhood, we shall be sustained and taught to sanctify our labours by the thought of Him rising up a great while before day, and retiring to solitude, that, braced by the new energy which communion with His Father gave Him, He might be ready when dawn came to begin that course of ceaseless toil for others, which was to fill every moment of His time till evening. Or if, again, in age we begin to think of rest in our families, we shall see Him in the house of Lazarus, or with John leaning on His bosom: Or, when sickness or death threatens, our continual meditation will be of Him in His agony. Thus, our thoughts of the one Christ are as various as the varying trials in which we need His example to encourage us.

In like manner, as in Christ himself, so also in His word, is there this endless variety in unity. Almost each book of the Bible,

when attentively considered, will be found to have its own peculiar character of piety; and probably God has employed the various dispositions and circumstances of the several human authors as the means for bringing out the various features of Divine truth, and thus providing that each sacred writer should speak through all ages with especial force to minds of his own stamp. Thus, the most careless reader is led to contrast the searching practical wisdom of the Proverbs, with the exalted contemplative piety of the Psalms; and in the New Testament it is scarce needful to mention the most commonly quoted instance of the different turn of thought observable in St. James and St. Paul—the one apparently accustomed, all the days of his manhood, to an unvarying* life of regulated holiness in daily attendance upon God's sanctuary—the other plucked suddenly as a brand from the burning, and sent to wander over the earth, preaching in season and out of season to the lost Gentiles

* Vide Euseb. Hist. Eccl. ii. 2. 3.

the unspeakable riches of that constraining grace which could save both him and them. Nay, all allow that the very Gospels which give us the details of our Lord's history, have their several characters—that, while one gives us especially the history of His outward activity, as sent to be the long-foretold Saviour of his countrymen, and the promulgator of a better practical law than that of Moses; another, as we have seen, initiates us into the sublimest truths of His spiritual being, and seems to prepare our minds for such unearthly speculations, by setting forth Divine discourses, in which He no longer insists on particular duties; but rises to those mysterious heights of God's nature and of man's, in which all duties have their springs, but which cannot be ascended by any but the longing spiritual heart.

This thought, as to the wonderful variety in the different parts of the Bible, well deserves to be considered further. As the sacred subject of the teaching in the books varies, so does their outward form. Some

would almost regard the Bible as the archetype of all human writings, the great Divine model, exhibiting each species in its perfectness. Not however to advance for it any such disputable claim, we have without any doubt in this one volume, a literature of almost every kind. To look at this in detail: in the Old Testament, we have, first of all, the majestic simplicity of the narrative, that describes the patriarchal times with winning grace and power — captivating by its striking pictures the volatile fancy of childhood, and charming us in age into forgetfulness of all present troubles, by that freshness which breathes from the acts and words of those who lived when society was young. What legendary tales of Greece or Rome, or of the old Babylonian or Egyptian kings, can compare even for mere attractiveness, with the holy story, in which God commissioned His servant to trace the origin of the chosen people, through the wilderness, and their slavery, up to the nomad tents of their great ancestor, and

through him to the fathers of the human race? And these simple annals take their rise in a sublime revelation of the creation of matter by the all-governing and all-pervading Mind, which separates them from human legends at their very outset, by causing them, in the midst of their childlike simplicity, to solve questions on which we shall in vain look for light in the works of the acutest uninspired intellects of the most cultivated age. Here surely, in the very form of this early history, is a variety in the midst of unity which proclaims itself divine.

Again, as we go further, we pass from the peaceful simplicity of the earliest to the stirring wars of the rude heroic times, in the tale of the gradual conquest of the promised land. Then succeeds the grave history of courts and camps, when Eastern civilisation was at its height; and interspersed are fair pictures of family and of rustic life, to win those whose homely spirits can scarcely gather lessons for their

own daily guidance from God's dealings with the great of the earth. Besides, we have the laws of the favoured nation in its political, its moral, and its ceremonial code, displayed with a minuteness to be found in no treatise on Spartan, or early Roman legislation, which, deeply studied, enable us to realise the daily habits of the people, while they may exercise also the ingenuity of the subtlest political philosophy to classify them, and refer them to their principles. Then come the grave ethical treatises, the experience of a long life passed in active duty, and arranged by a wisdom from above. Then too, in poetry, we have the pastoral, perhaps the drama, and above all the lyric in its highest perfection, interspersed in the earliest history, or standing forth by itself as the model for the holy praise of all generations—various in its psalmody as the thousand varying feelings of the calmly thankful, or desponding, or repenting, or longing, or exulting, or persecuted, or victorious soul of God's servant: while the vista in this

ancient choir is closed by the grandeur of the prophetic lyric, which carries on the bold longings of the ardent soul to the end of time.

Or turn again to the form in which God communicates his truth in the New Testament. Here are at least two different kinds of the most unadorned biography of the human life of the Redeemer; interspersed with the simplest moral lessons and the bright imaginative colouring of the parables for the childlike, acute arguments for the subtle, and the highest flights of heavenly philosophy for the contemplative. Then comes the plain history of the planting of the Church, and its struggles within and without, with Sadducaic and Pharisaic Judaism, with the sensuous classical, and mystic Eastern heathenism, again ending in a biography of the most energetic of the sons of men whom God employed to bear His truth through the struggle. Then we have the letters of this great Apostle and his brethren, to churches of all kinds: to the holy

Ephesians ; to the Corinthians, sorely tempted to make a compromise of their faith with the Epicurean luxury and philosophy which surrounded them ; against the stern Judaizers, who beset the Roman or Galatian Christians ; or those who would have misled the Thessalonians into a political fanaticism. Or think again how, all through these letters, we have the plain practical morality of conscience, mixed up with the holiest and most mysterious of those doctrines which Christ came to reveal, and even with reasonings on those dark subjects of controversy as to the freedom of man's will and its slavery, which have agitated the philosophic mind under every system of faith or intellectual teaching. And here again, as in the Old Testament, the sacred vista closes with that wild prophetic poetry which thrills so deeply through every meditative heart, as it opens to us mysterious glimpses into the final destiny of our whole race, and the particular mode in which God will award happiness or misery to each individual soul.

So that, in fact, throughout the whole volume, what is scarcely intelligible and somewhat repulsive to men of one time of life or state of civilisation, is the very point which gives the sacred books their chief power to attract men of another tone.

Yet, through all this variety of Old Testament and New, we cannot fail to note the perfect all-pervading unity. There are the same lessons of holy living; the same truths as to God's nature and man's—more clearly marked indeed, and of a deeper colouring, as the tide of revelation swells, but still substantially the same; the same struggle of the fallen human race with its great adversary is shadowed forth in all: but, above all, the whole Scripture is made one by the one holy image which every page reflects, the one Jesus Christ, himself the author and the subject of the whole, of whom Genesis speaks as the first creator, and the Apocalypse as the final judge—of whom every good man in its history is the type—whose sufferings and victory every prophet foretels—whose

glory is hymned in every song of praise—who is set forth as by his Spirit alone giving the power to obey each practical lesson and understand each doctrine. Thus the whole Bible is as it were one heavenly instrument of music, tuned to sing the glory of Him who is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. And it has its harmony from the very variety of the notes which are blended in its symphony: and each ear which God's Holy Spirit has prepared to love the sound, has its own peculiar note in which it especially delights. Far then be it from us the attempt to destroy the harmony by allowing no notes but one. Jesus Christ is brought before us, in the Bible as all-sufficient to supply all wants, to cheer, sustain, to animate, to lead to victory; for young and old; for men of every age, climate, degree of progress in civilisation; of all ranks, professions, talents, tempers. He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever; but in this sameness there is variety as infinite as that of His own Creation.

It would be easy to follow out this thought, and to show that this characteristic is to be found, not only in the mysterious features of the Lord himself, or in the subjects, or in the fashion of His heavenly volume; but still further, 1st, in those very different forms of contemplative or active piety, which are embodied in the lives of his chosen servants; and, 2ndly, in the way in which His universal church adapts itself to every age and country.

In the Bible how many and how different are the characters on which the Holy Spirit has stamped the seal of Christ's approbation. We have one form in the patriarch-chief, the priest as well as king and general of his people; another in the priest who in later days had no office but to wait on God's Sanctuary. We have one in the great king who adorns and extends his paternal realm, and cares daily for its laws, its commerce, and its literature; another in the mysterious prophet who flies from courts to the

brook Cherith,* and who seeks converse with his Maker in the dark solitudes of Horeb.† We have one in the courtier-sage of Babylon; another in the fishermen of Gennesaret. We have ‡ Mary resting at Christ's feet; and Martha busy with many worldly cares, yet full of faith, § to acknowledge without any hesitation the coming resurrection. We have Anna and Simeon || waiting all their time daily in the temple; and Cornelius ¶ full of alms and prayers in the midst of the duties of the Roman garrison. We have Paul the energetic, full of zeal; and John the meek, full of love. And so, to pass beyond the limits of sacred history, his mind must have little of a real Catholic spirit, who despises the wild retreat of the strange Egyptian hermit, because his soul kindles rather as he dwells on those public scenes in which Christ's truth was borne victorious in the sight of men, by the popular eloquence

* 1 Kings xvii.

‡ Luke x. 38.

|| Luke ii. 25, 36.

† Kings xix.

§ John xi. 24.

¶ Acts x.

of Chrysostom, or the practical vigour of Athanasius ; who cannot bear the homeliness of Latimer, because he loves rather to be instructed by the learning which almost overburdens the piety of Taylor ; who has no admiration for the uncompromising zeal of Luther, because he has more sympathy with that winning gentleness with which Leighton sought in vain to teach men of different thoughts and tempers to live as brethren.

And various as are the characters of Christ's individual saints, so various also are the forms into which His Church has moulded itself, whether it sits in learned leisure, as amongst ourselves, seeking to rear teachers, and afterwards to help them by its prayers ; or, actively engaged in its missionary work, either uplifts a warning voice, as in Apostolic times, in populous cities, or seeks for its scattered converts amid the stillness of American forests, or in the islands of the Pacific. The student of ecclesiastical history recognises the same Church, displaying itself under one form in

the second century, under another in the fourth, under another in the sixteenth, and under another in our own. But in each, keeping always steadily in view its grand end, we see that it subserves also by its peculiar development some immediate secondary purpose for which its Lord had destined it. In the first and beginning of the second century, we see it gliding on its way silently, attracting but little the notice of the heathen authorities; in the third, raising its head, and gaining outward grandeur as it grows, that it may be the better ready, when God's providence calls it, to receive an imperial convert, and sit as a queen among the nations. We see it moulding itself into one compact body in the fourth century, that when civil ties were burst by the irruption of barbarian hordes, and the whole fabric of imperial civilisation seemed crumbling into ruins, in it the scattered elements of society might be again cemented into one enduring fabric. By its influence we see the nations of Christendom, through

the dark times that follow, forced to own another outward bond of union besides that of common wars, and to fear another powerful arm besides that which wielded the sceptre or the sword. Again, in the sixteenth century we see the same Church reformed, becoming in Protestant countries the pledge and safeguard of their separate life and energy for the several nations, as it had been before of the common life of all. Again, we hope to see it in our own day rise to meet our own wants, silencing sceptical doubts by solid arguments, or filling up the unsatisfied longings of the cultivated mind by a deeper philosophy and poetry than infidelity could ever dream of. And, as we look forward, we see it promising at last in time, as the doctrines of love and charity gain ground in spite of all the accidental hindrances which now so much oppose them, to unite all the tribes of Europe, of the east, the west, and the far-distant south, into one holy brotherhood, in which each shall have full scope for the development of its own

genius, while all agree to worship Christ, and teach each other to speak His truth boldly, though they speak it in love. The intelligent reader of Ecclesiastical History knows that the forms which Christ's Church assumes must vary with its duties, and that the field of these duties is as wide as the world which He has willed to save.

And now let us think briefly what is the practical result to which these thoughts conduct us. One lesson which they teach is obvious, that we must study to live in Christian peace with all who are bound together in this essential unity. If the Apostle urges, "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men,"* we make, surely, no great demand if we substitute for "all men," all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. As this lesson will teach us not to confine too much the limits of our own communion, so even where circumstances over which we have no control have made outward fellowship

* Rom. xii. 18.

impossible, still shall we learn from it to study the fellowship of the heart. The most ardent attachment to our own holy forms, the most full appreciation of their efficiency in guiding our own souls in the way of life, nay, a conviction that under Providence our own Church seems more likely than any other to be our Lord's instrument in the great work of spreading a pure, and enlightened, and orderly Christianity throughout the world—our conviction of all this can have no natural connexion with any uncharitable feelings towards those who are not able to agree with us. "If," says Jeremy Taylor,* "the persons be Christians in their lives, and Christians in their professions, if they acknowledge the Eternal Son of God for their Master and their Lord, and live in all relations as becomes persons making such professions, why then should I hate such persons whom God loves, and who love God, who are partakers of Christ,

* Liberty of Proph., Ep. Dedicatory, p. ccccii. Works, London, 1839. Vol. vii.

and Christ hath a title to them, who dwell in Christ and Christ in them, because their understandings have not been brought up like mine; have not had the same masters; they have not met with the same books, nor the same company, or have not the same interest, or are not so wise, or else are wiser; that is, for some reason or other, which I neither do understand nor ought to blame, have not the same opinions that I have, and do not determine their school questions to the sense of my sect or interest?" When will the day come when Christians throughout the world will remember, that however great the differences which divide sincere believers from one another, these never can be one-thousandth part so important as those which ought to separate them by an impassable gulf from all who live in sin?

And here, lest this be misunderstood, it is well to speak plainly, and to state that this lesson must be taken with two limitations:—

1st. It will, of course, often be our bounden

duty to protest against the errors of our brethren, and partially at least to withdraw ourselves from acting with them, although we believe them to be, according to their consciences, sincere followers of the Lord Jesus Christ; because, though they have the right foundation, they may have raised on it the vain superstructure of wood, hay, stubble; and may thus teach a system, which, though its poison cannot deaden their own ardent faith, has a strong tendency to destroy the life of all who are instructed by them. Thus we are bound to protest against Rome, and stand apart from her, even though we know her annals to be adorned by many noble saints; and, while we pray for her daily, as included in Christ's Universal Church, and revere with trembling the goodness which we acknowledge to be often growing within her pale, we dare make no compromise with her, nor speak lightly of her sins.

2ndly. The unity which binds us all together has the Lord Jesus Christ for its centre; with those, therefore, who are not

one with us in Him, the text gives us no encouragement to live in Christian fellowship. If any regard the Lord and Saviour, who is to us the source of all our spiritual life, as a mere man, or a mere angel, or what is almost worse still, as a mere shadowy name—if any, while they profess to revere its author, have reduced Christianity to become one amongst many systems of poor human philosophy, while its words of life are placed in the rank of the early Roman legends; here is no pardonable variety, but a total change from what the Apostles taught; these men cannot be united with us in the worship of Him who is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.

It is always difficult and would savour of presumption, to attempt to state distinctly what is essential in Christianity; but, happily, the most universally revered of the councils of the Church may here be our guide. The best symbol of universal Christian brotherhood with those without our own particular Church, will be that which

the Fathers of Nicæa and Constantinople instituted, when they bequeathed to us that Confession which alone has received¹ the sanction both of East and West. And it is not unimportant to remark, in passing, that in the explanation which the Nicene Fathers appended to their Creed, they have, as to the great doctrines it was composed to teach, recorded their protest against all attempts to add to, as well as take away from, the fullness of its perfect statements.* Those whose hearts are full of the certain heavenly truths of which this Creed treats, will have little

* Vide Acta Conciliorum, Harduin, Paris, vol. i. p. 507 ; fol. 1715.—“Hæc est orthodoxorum et probatorum fides. Quorum autem omnium cognitio ex divinis Scripturis clare patet, et nos trecenti octodecim profiterur et confitemur atque cunctos protestamur hanc eandem esse fidem quam accepimus. Quamobrem maledicimus, anathematizamus et excommunicamus cunctos qui fidei huic aliquid, vel addunt vel detrahunt.”—The original Creed, to which the explanation containing these words is appended, referred only to the doctrine of our Lord’s nature, and His connexion with the Father. The Creed was completed, as is well known, when the articles on the Holy Spirit (with the exception of the “Filioque”) were added by the 150 bishops in the Constantinopolitan Council.—Vide Harduin, as above ; Mosheim’s Hist. Eccl., Sæc. IV. Pt. II. § xx.

leisure or inclination to be arguing on matters which are fairly disputable.

A second lesson, which the thoughts suggested by the text teach, is not less obvious than the first. In all our efforts to enforce Christ's truth, either on our brethren at home, or still more on men in other countries, we must be most cautious not to press on them a greater resemblance to ourselves than the Bible requires. If it be true that every natural temperament must have its fair room to work—that in the non-essential parts of Christianity what is suited to one honest and pious mind is repulsive to another—we must not fall into the error attributed to the Puritans, of forcing on the joyousness of childhood the austerity of age, nor strive to cool down all ardent feelings because we are ourselves calm and unexcitable. This surely is to confound our own prejudices with Christ's all-comprehensive truth; to put new wine into old bottles, and to act in direct opposition to the Apostle's precept of becoming all things to all men, if by any means we may win some.

But perhaps, after all, a third lesson, as it is the most obvious, is also the most important practically for each of us. Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, is, still, in the varying features of His heavenly character, suited to be the object which delights and sustains men of all natural dispositions, and under all circumstances. His religion also, brought home to our hearts, has as miraculously infinite a capability of adaptation to all our individual wants as He has himself. We can never, then, be in any circumstances in which we can be excused from acting directly on His example, and according to His commands.

Are many of you here now following the calm course of well-regulated discipline, not yet plunged into the world's cares and harassing business? He is your model now during the thirty years of silent preparation for His mission. It is better to insist on this over and over again, than to point out the particular sins which you must flee from; for if any of you will steadily keep Christ's

example before you, and try to realise the thought that He, your God, is by your side now in His Spirit, to sustain you against temptation, and lead you on to holiness, in the midst of the varied temptations of this place, you must live as Christians. Again, no one can tell of some of you when you leave this place, in what countries or professions your lot in life may be cast; but if what has been now stated be true, there can be no place where Christ and His religion will not follow you. There is no delusion more certain to ruin souls than that which so often whispers, that Christ's example and rules may be well suited for those in other circumstances, but do not apply to ourselves. There is, in truth, no place but Hell where Christ does not enter, no profession but the devil's service which He is not ready to sanctify. The soldier, the merchant, the sailor, the lawyer, may be, and often by God's grace has been, as directly employed in Christ's service as the ministers of his inner sanctuary. If His Holy Spirit

would only enable us to keep the thought of Him and His sustaining grace before us wherever we go, there would be no fear for us, either here or in still more dangerous scenes; for we might feel secure that He would guide us safely, and lead us at last to His everlasting kingdom.

DISCOURSE III.

DANGERS AND SAFEGUARDS OF THE CRITICAL STUDY OF THE BIBLE.

ST. JOHN XX. 31.

“These are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.”

IN considering these words formerly, as applied to St. John's Gospel, it was natural to remark, that they set forth the object proposed not by St. John alone, but by all the Evangelists. But this statement may be extended much further. The words of the text may apply not to this or that portion merely of the Old or New Testament, but to the whole Bible: and of course they point out the object, not merely of the human authors, but of God.

Now I am the more induced to dwell on this point, because in a former sermon, in connexion with this text, we were led to certain historical and critical observations on the composition of one of the Gospels; and the tendency of all such study of the sacred books, unless under very watchful guidance, must be to withdraw our minds in some degree from the one great spiritual object with which they were all written.

I propose now to examine into some of the dangers of those perilous studies connected with the history and criticism of the sacred volume, in which all in this place are more or less engaged.

And first of all I would remark, that, in these studies, from their very nature, there can be no safety for us, unless by God's help we keep continually in mind that great truth which our text suggests: viz., that all the objects of the particular books, proposed by the particular human authors, in the particular circumstances in which they or their first readers were placed, are subordi-

nate, and to be reckoned as nothing when compared with this one great spiritual object of the whole, proposed by the Divine Author, viz., the salvation of lost man through Jesus Christ.

The chief of the dangers to which I have alluded, arise necessarily from the very form in which God has been pleased to communicate the revelation of His will. No one can enter at all deeply on the critical and historical study of the Bible without having his attention very soon arrested by the following difficulty:—We hold, that, when the Lord Jesus Christ withdrew His inspired teachers from the world, and left His church to struggle henceforward without miraculous help, He ordained that His Apostles should leave behind them a complete body of Christian truth, perfectly sufficient, by the help of His ever-present Spirit, to guide each Christian's belief in all essential points, and thus to save his soul. We hold also that this body of truth is sufficient, by the principles which shine forth

everywhere throughout its unsystematic, but perfectly plain teaching, to guide the un-inspired rulers of the Church, if they will humbly seek to learn, in the formation of those varying rules of discipline, which must from time to time be laid down and changed by their authority, to suit the varying circumstances of each age. Now, the question which very soon meets every one who studies the Bible critically, is this: How is the idea of this perfect completeness of the sacred volume to be reconciled with what criticism tells us of the gradual, and almost, as it were, fortuitous production of the several books? The obvious answer is, that the whole of this difficulty arises from looking merely to the human authors, not to our Lord himself, who by his Holy Spirit guided and controlled all for His one great purpose of which the text speaks.

To examine this more in detail—It is the key-stone of our Theology that Holy Scripture is complete: yet St. John says in the verse preceding our text, “Many other signs

truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book." Many other discourses certainly did the Lord hold with His disciples, both in public and in private, the memory of which has perished. Many others besides the four Evangelists (St. Luke intimates*) took in hand to set forth, in order, a history of the Lord's life and sufferings; and if St. Luke, in the passage referred to, be speaking of inaccurate written histories, there must besides these have been, if not written, certainly many floating oral accounts of the gospel narrative, coming from Apostles, and equally authentic, if they had survived, with those which we now reverence. Moreover, even if the lost Epistle to the Laodiceans† could be proved to be none other than that to the Church of Ephesus, ‡ still St. Paul, and St. Peter, and St. James, and St. John, to say nothing of their fellow Apostles, must have written letters to churches and individuals, besides

* Luke, i. 1, 2.

† Coloss. iv. 16.

‡ Cf. Olshausen, *Bibl. Comment.* Coloss. iv. 16.

those which have come down to us. All these are lost: the very names of them have perished: the utmost ingenuity of research cannot find either the works themselves, or any account of them in the remains of Christian antiquity. Very few of the many sayings of our Lord not recorded in the Gospels have been handed down to us, and these important only from the heavenly majesty of Him who uttered them.*

Now, it may be true that no one now, after the subject has been so thoroughly investigated, expects the canon of Scripture to be increased by the discovery of any lost writing of the Apostles. It is allowed that we know now all of the Apostles' teaching that by human means we can ever expect to know of it: but men not unnaturally ask, How can that be considered as a complete code of Christian laws, and storehouse of Christian principles, perfect in itself, which

* Vide Acts, xx. 35. Cf. Olshausen, in loc. Cf. also Fabricius, *Codex Apocr. Novi Test.* (Hamburg, 1719), p. 321, where these sayings are collected and classified.

history and criticism show us to be thus fragmentary?

And from this difficulty may naturally spring many errors. On the one hand, if Scripture be supposed to contain but a small portion of what we may learn of God's revealed word, what more natural than to hold that its deficiencies must be filled up from some other stream of inspiration? At first, men may strive to gain the aid they need from some supposed remains of the unwritten teaching of the Apostles; but soon, forced by history and criticism in candour to admit that no such remains exist, they will more boldly throw themselves, with the Romanists, on the aid of an ever-present Church, which, claiming to be itself inspired, professes to fill up the scanty measure of Scripture-teaching from its own unbounded stores.

On the other hand, if men be convinced not only that all the unwritten teaching of the Apostles has perished, but that these founders of Christ's church have never had

any inspired successors ; that it was not till very degenerate days that any inspiration similar to that of Scripture was ever claimed for fathers or councils ; that the signs of an Apostle have never been wrought by any but those to whom Christ at first gave them ; what more natural than for one convinced of the impiety of such pretensions, who still looks on Scripture as very scanty, and knows not where else to turn, to give up the thought of being guided by inspiration altogether ; to make human reason his guide ; and to assign to the Scripture a co-ordinate place in his esteem with Plato, or Aristotle, or the Institutes of Justinian ; as others have classed it with Cyprian, or Chrysostom, or the decrees of Nicæa ?

Into one or other of these two species of error there is great danger lest all critical students of the Bible fall, if they do not, by the help of Divine grace, keep their eyes fixed on the Lord Jesus Christ as by His providence over-ruling the composition of the whole book, and making all the various

wishes, and powers, and necessities of its human authors and first readers work together for that one grand object which He, its Divine Author, had always steadily in view.

The passage of Irenæus,* as to the number of the Gospels, is almost too trite for quotation: "As there are four quarters of the world in which we live, and four chief winds, and the Church is spread over all the earth, but the pillar and support of the Church is the Gospel and its breath of life, plainly the Church must have four columns, and from these must come forth four blasts breathing immortality and giving life to men." Nor is this mere rhetoric. Each Evangelist, at the time when he wrote, had doubtless his own objects: he knew the wants of those for whom he wrote: St. Matthew, as a Jew to the Jews; St. Mark, as a compiler for St. Peter's converts; St. Luke, to edify Theophilus; St. John, as a disciple of the true Gnosis,

* Adv. Hæres. c. iii. p. 237. Paris, 12mo. 1545.

to spiritualise and thus destroy the false. But, as all the winds in their various courses are but the ministers of God's pleasure,—each fulfilling its appointed office in the great work of purifying the atmosphere—so the labours of all four Evangelists together produce in unison that one history of the Divine and human perfection with which Christ has purposed to purify His Church. He employed each as a workman to form, according to his capacity, some one portion of that great statue of Himself, which he intended to be the object of His Church's adoration through all time. The workman might not aspire further while he worked than to complete his own allotted portion of the task; but, if we would understand the whole, we must look to the designs of the great Master-builder who employed and directed all. And thus, when St. Paul, roused by the immediate wants of a particular church in his own day, took up his pen to write to the Christians of Galatia, the Lord Jesus still guided him, and ordained that the

Roman, Galatian, Corinthian, Ephesian, and Thessalonian converts should be types of classes to be found in the Church in all ages ; so that all men might in them see their own likeness, and the book of these many fragmentary writings might be formed into one perfect whole.

Thus our Lord ordained. In this one book (however fragmentary its original composition) we find that one sufficient guide, for which we shall in vain seek in the works of mere uninspired reason, whether pretending to no higher title than that of philosophy, or falsely claiming to be divine.

And thus keeping our eyes steadily fixed on God's one great purpose, as unfolded in the text, we shall never be distracted by our examination of the human motives which influenced the several human authors, or the circumstances which formed, as it were, the mould in which the heavenly metal was to be fused.

We have then seen a great danger to which the critical student of the Bible must

be exposed. It is a very extensive danger, comprising under it many forms of evil, of some of which it may be necessary to speak more in detail.

Without a deep conviction of that all-important truth of which the text reminds us, it must, we repeat, be impossible to pass safely through this dangerous field of study. Perhaps there is no period in a thoughtful man's life, in which the crisis of his future spiritual being is more deeply involved, than that in which he first begins critically to study God's holy word. So awful indeed are the results which may follow, and so many are the instances in which faith is altogether shipwrecked, that men advanced in years, who have themselves known the peril, cannot think without fear of the duty of leading their younger brethren to enter on this field, when God's Providence has imposed this duty on them as teachers in His Church. The strong practical bias of the English mind may have prevented the danger from being so clearly developed

amongst ourselves as in foreign countries; but still is there, even in our own country, enough to warn us. We need not go abroad to look for instances of men who, having begun with the simple belief of childhood, have plunged thoughtlessly into the enticing field of Scripture criticism, reckless of the hidden pitfalls which on every side beset their way; and such men, whose minds are not sufficiently imbued with a deep conviction of the sacredness of the task on which they enter, have often fallen, first into cold doubts; then into so-called philosophic indifference; and lastly into daring unbelief. No wonder then that a man of thoughtful mind should long pause and hesitate before he engages himself, and still more before he leads others to engage, in studies amid the mazes of which his soul may so easily be lost.

We may, indeed, feel that perfect conviction which the Holy Spirit works in humble hearts, that the everlasting arms of our Lord and Saviour will be beneath us to sustain us

in every hour of peril, and that, provided we be in the path of duty in our studies, we must be safe; but, even with this feeling, there is much to disquiet us. The faith of him who is carried safely through these studies may, it is true, be of a higher order intellectually, and become even morally more perfect, because it has stood some trial, and by the grace of God has gained manliness as it has been kept unscathed; yet, still in the various steps of the struggle which it has undergone, there has been unhappiness and danger.

When the simple lessons which we learned in childhood are first examined by us with a critic's eye, who shall explain the strange feelings that spring up within! In self-confident and thoughtless minds, nay, perhaps in all, there will be at first a burst of that enthusiasm with which youth and vigour scarcely ever fail to welcome an emancipation from controlling power. If this feeling continues, the danger is imminent, and the soul must suffer grievous loss. But the

humble, faithful, and loving heart, if it gives way to this feeling for a moment, will soon return to sober thought; and will be almost more disposed to long for the return of those happy days of childhood, in which it never knew what doubts were, than to look forward with any confident anticipation to that full manhood in which, by God's help, after having known, it will be sure to vanquish them. While the mind is in this perplexed state, it will look almost with envy on the contented acquiescence of the uninstructed poor, who have never dreamed of any difficulties, and whose faith reposes happily on those detached portions of the authorised English version of the Scriptures with which they happen to be familiar, as affording for all their needs a full and satisfying supply from God's living oracles.

And if this state of perplexity be not merely a short transition state of trouble, from which, by God's mercy, our minds soon pass on to more certainty of faith, we may well envy the most ignorant. To these, God's

ever-present Spirit makes their acquaintance with His will, however limited, to be a sure foundation, while we, still doubting, shall be able, in all the wide range on which we seek to build, to find nothing but shifting quicksands.

Now, I believe, that in all the worst and darkest difficulties of an inquiring mind, even if the genuineness and authenticity and inspiration of the holy books be themselves brought into question, every man will be comforted and kept in safety who fixes his thoughts steadily on that portion of the great truth suggested by the text which his present unhappy doubts will allow him to receive. The Almighty Father wishes the happiness and salvation of all His children: no man with an honest and good heart ever doubted this. These books claim to have been written under His especial guidance, that men believing them might have life through Christ's name; a claim which the good and wise of all times have been the more ready to admit, the better and the

wiser they have become. The books have doubtless a very striking majesty about them, which must command respect; so that, however we may doubt, it will be madness to refuse to study them with reverent attention, and, thus studying them, we must at last, by God's help, be safe.

We have seen, then, enough to convince us of the unsettling tendency of the studies of which we are speaking; how apt they are to lead the mind into scepticism; and from scepticism the rebound is very natural into that blind deference to authority which shuts its eyes to all reasoning, because, for fear of harassing doubts, it dares not any longer to think.

And here two questions now very naturally arise. If the critical study of the Bible be thus beset with very serious difficulties—if in many minds it be very likely to shake their conviction of the perfectness and all-sufficiency of God's holy word—if it suggests, as we advance in it, an infinite number of doubts as to particular passages

or particular books — if every man who engages zealously in the study is sure to have his mind, to a certain extent at least, and for a time, unsettled — First, Why should we engage in the study at all? and Secondly, If we are forced to engage in it, can we really pass through it safe?

The answer to the first of these questions is obvious. The study must be engaged in by persons in the circumstances of most of us, because God has willed that it should be indispensable. We may, indeed, wish that God had so ordered man's mind that no doubts had ever arisen in it—that the very sight of the Bible had caused a conviction of the truth and divine authority of every part of it to flash on every mind—that it had been written in some universal language, which required no aid of translations to be intelligible in every land—that there had been no verse in it at all difficult in structure or meaning, requiring to be illustrated from the human author's habitual mode of expression, or the circumstances of his age and

country. But whatever we may wish, this has not been God's plan: He has given the revelation of His will in such a form as requires the aid of man's other light of reason to make it plain. Nay, He has even ordained that, as an understanding of his truth is not forced upon us by the mere letter of His word, the mode in which we exert ourselves to obtain an insight into its full meaning shall be, to many of us, the trial of our faith. Thus we may see generally, how, for very many of us, this critical study of the Bible is indispensable.

And this point, if established, involves also the answer to our second question: God cannot have made it an imperative duty to enter on any course of study, in which He is not ready, by His Almighty power, to shield us. But the full answer to these two questions is so important, that it may well occupy by itself a whole discourse. Having now pointed out some of the chief dangers of these studies, we may, by God's blessing, inquire more fully at a future time; first, into

their absolute necessity; and secondly, into their safety. At present let us content ourselves with the prayer, that if we are led by duty to engage in them, we may do so, by the help of God's Spirit, in all humility and never in self-confidence.

DISCOURSE IV.

DANGERS AND SAFEGUARDS OF THE CRITICAL STUDY OF THE BIBLE.

ST. JOHN, XX. 31.

“These are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.”

IN my last sermon I endeavoured to set forth some of the great dangers to which the critical student of the Bible is exposed, from the unsettling tendency of many of the speculations into which he is necessarily led. I will not now recapitulate what was said in pointing out the nature of these difficulties; every earnest student will be sure soon to encounter them, and understand their nature, whether it be to the strictly philological or to the historical department of Scripture criticism that he applies himself. This criticism, whether it speaks directly of the

language of the Bible, or of the circumstances and habits of the authors by whom that language is employed, or tells us what is known of the history of the several documents which compose the volume, directs our thoughts always to the contemplation of the human vehicle, by which divine truth has been expressed. There is danger, therefore, always, lest we forget the divine in our contemplation of the human—lest, while we learn to handle familiarly the outward case, our thoughts may be withdrawn from the jewel of countless price which it contains.

Leaving, then, the difficulties alluded to to speak for themselves and explain their own nature, I proceed to a more full consideration of the two important questions formerly proposed. If the critical study of the Bible be thus beset with very serious difficulties, first, why should we engage in a study so confessedly dangerous? and, secondly, if we do engage in it, can we really pass through it safe?

I. Now, in examining the first of these

questions, we must observe, first, that the critical study of the Bible must be necessary at all times, for without such study we cannot arrive at its real meaning. This, as has been observed above, is a consequence of the form in which God has been pleased to reveal his will. Not to dwell on the obvious fact, that the Scriptures have been written in languages now dead, which, before they can be understood, must be translated into our own, and that these translations must, from time to time, be tested, if we are to feel any security that they are correct—it is almost equally obvious that, even when translated, the books require aid of illustration and comparative criticism to make their meaning plain.

It is granted indeed, that the great truths on which our salvation depends, are so plainly set forth in the statements of the Bible, that, when once the learned have translated the book into our mother tongue, he who runs may read and understand these statements sufficiently, if he read them with a humble heart. It is granted also most fully, that for

those great essential truths, which are, I believe, in name at least, and outward profession, assented to by the great majority of those who call themselves Christians throughout the globe, the teaching of God's Holy Spirit is a readier and far better guide, needing but little aid of human criticism. But the truths, a belief of which is essential for our individual salvation, are very few as they are very simple. And no one doubts that the Bible contains, besides these, many other truths, some plain, and others hidden beneath its surface, which God would not have caused to be written there, had He not intended them to be in some way influential on man's conduct, and therefore, indirectly, on his prospects for eternity. From the passages containing these, all our lengthened dogmatical statements of Christian doctrine are to be at first derived, or afterwards tested. It is very frequently a man's conviction of the truths to be found in such passages, which causes him to adhere to one division of Christ's Universal Church rather than another. And these are the very passages of which the

true meaning cannot be settled without the aid of criticism. Hence there can be no question as to the necessity of this study for all Christ's ministers, and for all also among the brethren, to whom He has entrusted leisure and ability and learning to be used in His cause.

II. Again, let it be remembered, that if these studies be discouraged, men will lose a great help which God intended should assist in enabling them to realise the full force and power of both the narrative and the directly doctrinal teaching of the Bible even in its plainest parts. Who is there brought up in a Christian country, who does not find great difficulty in forming to himself a well-defined and vivid picture of those truths, with the expression of which he has been familiar from his childhood?

Doubtless, the power of calling up in our minds these vivid pictures, is something very different, indeed, from saving Christian Faith, which is an energetic habit of our whole spiritual nature, and not of the imagination

merely, however chastened and directed aright. But neither can it reasonably be doubted, that our faith may be much assisted by such vivid conceptions of the Gospel truths, in the same manner as the usual lifeless and formal way in which we think of them is a serious stumbling-block to many. How many are there of us to whom the several Apostles or Prophets are but names, suggesting no traits of individual character either in their actions or their writings; who look upon the several Gospels or Epistles but as convenient divisions or heads of chapters, for enabling us more easily to make our references to the sacred book, without having ever realised the particular definite purpose and marked distinguishing features of each! How many are there of us before whom the whole sacred history and its doctrines float with all the indistinctness of a confused and misty vision, leaving but a vague and dull impression, such as intelligent men would never be content to have received in any matter of mere human interest to which their attention had been

drawn. There is not more difference in the study of ordinary history, between that vague catalogue of the names of kings, and the dates of their births and deaths, with which the memories of children are often unwisely burdened, and that clear picture of men's thoughts and deeds and mode of living, which an intelligent student delights to form, from the annals and private memoirs of an age which has excited his keenest interest, than there is between the dull assent which most men give, as a matter of course, to what the Bible tells them, and that lively conception of all its various truths, which a soul, at once faithful and intelligent, may, by the blessing of the Holy Spirit, gain from an earnest study of the whole Bible, with all those many human aids which God provides for us.

Doubtless, God's spirit does compensate for the want of this assistance to His faithful poor and illiterate servants; but, for those of us whom He has blessed with leisure and ability, there is no human means more likely than this study for enabling us, by His aid, to live

with an ever-present feeling of the reality of those unseen friends and interests of which the Bible speaks to us.

3. There is a third reason which obliges us to encourage the critical study of the sacred writings; even the very fact, that many difficulties are known to attach to it. Speaking humanly, there is scarcely anything more likely to spread infidelity amongst us, than the existence of a general suspicion, that many doubts and difficulties are involved in the criticism of the Bible, which no one has the courage or ability to grapple with. Akin to this, is that miserable distrust which the impolitic severity of the laws has often allowed infidels to spread, by insinuating that they could say much against Christianity, if they were not restrained by the fear of civil penalties.

Wherever a general suspicion is engendered, however unfounded it may be, that something is amiss in our system of religion, which from policy or cowardice we are anxious to conceal, there hidden infidelity will make rapid progress, and many a man

of honest mind will in secret be tortured with anxiety, having no leisure to examine for himself the difficulties he has heard of, and be distressed by a painful impression that those who ought to examine for him are deliberately or unwittingly banded together to mislead. Thus, as is usual wherever men take upon themselves to act against God's purposes, that very infidelity, the fear of which scared them from their duty, will grow with tenfold vigour because they have neglected to perform it.

And here it seems well to remark that the critical study of the Bible is more than ever necessary to be encouraged now, from the particular circumstances of our own age and country. Whatever may be thought of the honesty or policy of endeavouring to conceal difficulties and stifle inquiry formerly, the days when such methods of propping up the truth of God were possible, are at an end. Or—not to speak harshly of the well-meant conduct of good men in former times—for us in this country the days when the minds of

the mass of men could be directed, as if they were children, and withdrawn from all dangerous speculations to those thoughts which their superiors in education considered to be edifying, have passed away. The old times, with their mingled good and evil—the old ideas of the paternal duty of government both in Church and State to lead the mass of men as it were blind-fold, and to shut up knowledge within the privileged caste of those who were thought likely to make a good use of it, have passed. We may look back on the retiring scene, and while its less pleasing features are softened by the effect of distance as it fades from our view, we may long to recall it—some may even wish, in their day-dreams, that they had lived four hundred years ago; but, whether it were good or whether it were evil, the old state of things can never be brought back. It is in our own generation, and amid the men of our own generation—amid their thoughts, bad as well as good, their questionings and doubtings, and

shallow disputations, as well as their energetic impatience of concealment and hatred of all formalism, that God has placed the scene of our responsibilities; and it is vain to think that we can do any good amongst them by attempting to teach them on the principles of a departed state of society, and not as their own characters and circumstances require.

It is certain that every man in this country who can read, either knows already, or may learn any day as he reads, what those difficulties with respect to the Bible are on which infidels insist; and it must be well also that he should know their refutation; or, better still, that he should feel that confidence which is inspired by a persuasion that good and learned men have candidly met these difficulties, grappled with them fairly, and vindicated the truth. Nor can this service be said to have been performed for us by the able writers on Evidences of the last age; for, since their time, infidelity has much changed the grounds of its attack. Its objections are

much more connected now than in former times with a minute critical examination of the sacred books; and therefore it is in the field of criticism that it must be met and overthrown.

Nor is it for the sake of those beneath us only that such protection is required. A calm review of the history of our Church from the Reformation downwards, will probably convince us that almost every generation, as it has had its own peculiar character of theology, has had also its own peculiar dangers for the learned as well as for the ignorant. One or two men of leading minds have had their thoughts directed in some particular channel by their early education, or the society into which they have been thrown, and all the world of their contemporaries, eager for novelty, has hastened in the path they pointed out. Or, again, political events have occurred, which have forced on men a reconsideration of principles long deemed irrefragable; or, opening up fresh intercourse with foreign nations, have im-

bued us with a taste for the theology or philosophy which they admire.

Now of course it would be presumption to speak confidently as to the particular direction in which men's minds are likely to wander during the coming age. But there can be no wisdom in refusing to form reasonable conjectures, because we are not gifted with prophetic power. Our attention has been of late so much and so deeply occupied by the unexpected revival of the controversies which were fought out and really settled at the time of the Reformation, and, in this place especially, the errors we deplore, connected with this controversy, have been rendered so deeply interesting, from what we know of the personal excellence of those who have been most prominent in maintaining them, as well as from the many ties of almost sacred friendship which these controversies have burst or rudely tried, that we are apt very naturally to over-estimate the importance of what, for the moment, we see actually around us. Yet surely, if we

examine the real state of our country and of Europe altogether, we must allow that the great conflict of this age is not that between the Romanist and the Protestant, but between the Infidel and the Christian; and that Romanism is for us principally formidable only from the advantage it must give to infidelity by the false foundation on which it teaches men to build their faith, and the poor human superstructure by which it weakens while it overloads the inestimable power of Christ's simple truth. It is certain that as Romanism spreads, Infidelity will spread also. But we must not mistake therefore the nature of our real contest: and there is much danger lest the noise and interest of our immediate disputations with those whose errors we are right deeply to deplore, but who still love the Lord Jesus Christ, and seek, in their own mistaken way, to maintain His cause as eagerly as ourselves, lead us to neglect the greatest danger which threatens us from the enemy that abhors Him. Infidelity also, be it noted, is

always most active and most to be feared while disputes distract the Church.

Now there are many symptoms to warn us, that, if such an attack from Infidelity as is reasonably to be apprehended should be made, we are not as yet prepared as we ought to be to meet it. It is sure to come upon us now-a-days in a new and subtle form, often arming itself with its most formidable weapons from the very store-house of the Sacred books. And is it not certain that there are many questions connected with the authenticity and authority of these books, on which we, in this country, with all our vaunted learning, are not as yet prepared with the requisite information and thought to enable us to vindicate the truth? Is it not too true that the great majority of serious men feel themselves quite taken, as it were, by surprise, when such difficulties are forced upon their notice? And if the watchmen of Israel have not looked their danger steadily in the face, how can they be prepared to meet it.

Moreover, it is well to remark, in passing, that we are ourselves (in many respects very properly) encouraging studies in matters of secular literature, which are sure, in time, to suggest to all minds, that the freedom of inquiry which they engender may sooner or later be applied also to the Sacred books. And yet, while we encourage these studies, and therefore deliberately run the risk of all the danger that must follow from them, we have taken little pains to provide ourselves with that knowledge which is absolutely necessary to prevent them from being perverted. How few of those, *e. g.*, whom we train to a free examination and discussion of the early Roman History, are able to understand and show to others that its doubtful legends have their counterpart in the spurious Gospels or the Rabbinical traditions of the History of Abraham, and that, in trusting the real Sacred books to the rejection of these fables, we are already, through God's mercy, resting on that sure basis of historical truth with respect to

Christianity and the older Revelation, on which the great Roman historian wishes to place us as to his subject, by his laborious research.

The difficulties that threaten to come upon us, are then to be met, not surely by closing our eyes to the danger, and looking with suspicion upon those who would prepare themselves to meet it; not surely by lagging behind our age, and allowing our minds to be engrossed with the refutation of errors that have already had their day; but by seriously applying ourselves to those many and very severe studies which are absolutely indispensable as the discipline that is to train us for the coming warfare. Speaking humanly, if infidelity is to be resisted, it can only be by our opposing the true criticism to the false, and being able to bring as great an amount of philological and historical knowledge and deep research to aid the cause of Christ's truth as are sure to be employed in the assaults by which it is menaced.

The young student of Theology has indeed before him, at this time, a very great and

noble task, which, by its very difficulty, may stimulate him to exertion. There is no power of his mind which may not find an adequate employment in those great studies, to which the exigencies of the Church seem to summon him. It would be ruinous to put off accustoming ourselves to these investigations till the necessity becomes urgent—to neglect to train our troops till the enemy is at our gates. Many years must be given to the diligent study of the language and history of the Bible, if we would be ready really to defend it when infidelity assails. And even independently of the heavenly nature of the subjects with which we are brought into familiar intercourse, and the promise of God's spirit, which gives our whole occupation an ennobling character, there is no study in which all our powers of memory, judgment, reasoning, imagination may better find an adequate field for their activity than this criticism of the Holy books.

II. But it is full time to turn now to our second question: Useful as these studies may

be, can we really pass through them unhurt? The answer has already necessarily been in part anticipated. God cannot have made it the imperative duty of His servants to enter on any course of study, without being ready to shield us, while engaged in it, by His Almighty power.

Moreover, we must not too greatly magnify the dangers that beset the critical study of the Bible. Whatever anxiety we may justly feel as we enter on it, we must not forget that dangers, the same in kind, beset the whole field of Theological inquiry. If Theology be that science in which man clothes in human language, and classifies under human divisions, what Revelation suggests to him of God, there must always be danger for the student, lest he lay a rash human hand on the Divine Ark, and tread with soiled feet upon the holy ground. Whenever the divine and the human are thus brought into close proximity, it requires no small degree of faithful reverence to enable us, while we probe and examine and test, still to worship with

humble adoration whatever is shown to be divine. No man who regards the welfare of his soul will dare to enter on theological studies at all without anxiety and prayer—whether his duty call him to the difficult and dangerous task of examining creeds and articles, and, while he traces their history and construction, thus separating between the formal human expression and the divine spiritual essence which it incases; or whether ascending the long stream of the Church's history, he is called to point out, in examining its teaching, the almost imperceptible line which, in early times, before they had joined in one discoloured flood, separated the pure living waters of life near their source from the foul streams of false doctrine which were continually flowing in and striving to adulterate them.

In fact, throughout the whole of Theology there are difficulties similar in kind to that which must have often shaken the faith of the Apostles and of the Virgin Mother, when called to recognise the Eternal Word, the

Creator of the World in Him, whom in his humble fleshly nature they had so often seen and heard and handled in the intimate familiarity of daily life. This is the very difficulty which has made some inquisitive travellers return infidels from the holy countries—men who have come, from their very familiarity, to deem it impossible that God Almighty could ever have spoken in accents of thunder on those mountain peaks, or the Eternal Son have wrought His divine miracles on the borders of that lake, or in the streets of those towns, all of which are now associated in their minds with the common-place details of their ordinary travel.

In fact similar dangers pervade our whole life. It is well for us to remark, that the danger of error is not entirely on one side. There is in all the world that strange blending of the divine and human, which makes it very difficult for us, thus brought into contact with the two united, to escape the danger on the one hand of superstition, on the other of irreverence. It requires a

strong mind and a strong faith to steer between the two. While this man regards the holy countries with the indifference of scepticism—refusing to believe because of the commonness of their appearance, that heavenly works were ever wrought in them, another is undertaking a laborious pilgrimage, and paying to their mere soil and locality that reverence which is due only to Him whose presence once ennobled them. It is in the same spirit, that, while some degrade the sacred volume to the level of a profane classic by their irreverent criticism, others would superstitiously warn us not to study it with any real accuracy, as a thing too sacred to be touched by human learning.

Now, without doubt, it is in all cases very difficult for men, in a reverential and yet intelligent spirit, to examine minutely any compound of the divine and the human elements, and to pay to each its due regard; but the duty of thus distinguishing is so continually imposed on us in life, that, as has been said already, we may safely trust our

Heavenly Master, if we are humble, to keep us right. Look, for example, to God's providential judgments. We need scarcely be reminded of the difficulty of distinguishing between the influence of human second causes, and that controlling power which proceeds direct from Him. Now, in this particular instance, to neglect either the divine or the human element is to run at once into serious error. If we neglect man's part, we seem to be fatalists; if God's, we are practically atheists; but there is no reason for neglecting either. And so is it also in all our critical study of the Bible. As a frail body and an immortal soul are united in every human being—as the body is allowed to affect and operate upon the soul—as Christian doctrine does not make a sharp distinction between the two elements of body and soul in man, but teaches us to allow each its due scope in fulfilling the object of our compound being—since we know that the Lord Jesus has glorified even that element which is inferior and

vile; so in God's word the two elements of the divine spirit, and the human form or expression, are united indissolubly: yet are they not to be confounded, or to be treated both alike. And there is no reason surely, because we treat the inferior element with that freedom with which God has willed it to be treated, on the very ground that it is inferior—there is no reason for our thereby losing our reverence for that element which is Divine.

We return, in fact, in conclusion, to the point from which we set out. Let us remember when we begin the critical study of the Bible, that God himself has been believed by all the best and wisest of men to be in the highest and truest sense its author; that He is asserted, as our text reminds us, to have caused it to be written for the most important of all objects: viz., that men may believe that “Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and that believing they may have life through His name:” let us accompany our study with earnest prayer for guidance, knowing that we

are engaged in a serious task where there are many perils, and the Lord Jesus will Himself lead us on in safety. If we study critically in this frame of mind, we shall never forget to adore the Holy Spirit their guide, while we trace the character and style of St. Matthew or St. Paul as modified according to God's purpose by the temporal circumstances in which He placed them. We shall be as little likely to admire the poetry without bowing to the inspiration of the Prophets, or to overlook the Almighty wisdom of God while we think of Moses' Egyptian learning, as we shall be to forget that there is a hand which can direct the thunderbolt at will, because we have learned something of electricity, or to deny the divine creation of the world, if geology could teach us to mark the stages of its formation; or to deride the truth that ungodly nations are visited by God's vengeance, because we can trace the gradual progress of their commercial or military decay.

In fact, all studies, and the critical study

of the Bible, like all others, while they are a savour of death unto death to those who hurry into them in wanton self-confidence of shallowness and pride, may most surely be used to God's glory by those who enter on them thoughtfully with a faithful and praying heart. And both we who teach and those who are taught, and those amongst us, above all, who live the life of speculative students, will do well to remember how solemn a trust the Lord Jesus Christ has committed to us in giving us our acuteness, or our leisure, or our knowledge, to be employed in the study of His Word.

DISCOURSE V.

THEOLOGY BOTH OLD AND NEW.

II. TIMOTHY iii. 14-15.

“ But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned, and hast been assured of—knowing of whom thou hast learned them ;

“ And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation.”

SURELY no criticism will ever shake our belief that this Second Epistle to Timothy, even though it may not contain St. Paul's last written words, has yet been providentially preserved, and caused to find its place in the holy volume, especially for this, amongst other purposes, that it may set before us the frame of mind in which the Saint did contemplate the near approach of his martyrdom. Think of the express declaration in the fourth chapter, (v. 6.) “ I am now

ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand," which in the original is even stronger—'εγὼ γὰρ ἤδη σπένδομαι καὶ ὁ καιρὸς τῆς ἐμῆς ἀναλύσεως ἐφέστηκε—“I am now being offered, and the time of my departure hath come upon me,” (v. 7), “I have fought” the “good fight,” “I have finished my course.” To this add the exulting strains whereby he gives utterance to the assurance of his faith—which, contrasted as they are with the almost fearful diffidence of an earlier epistle,* seem almost to speak of the songs of angels already bursting on his ears and heaven opening on his dying eyes, and Jesus visibly manifested “standing on the right hand of God”—“I have kept the faith,” “Henceforth there is laid up for me” the “crown of righteousness,” (v.v. 7-8), and “The Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom” (v. 18). Think, also of what have not unnaturally been considered the preparations for his trial—as the call for the

* 1 Cor. ix. ; also Philipp. iii. 12.

important parchments which he had left at Troas (v.13): think of the apparent allusion to his first hearing before the emperor (v.16), and the danger of the lion's mouth (v.17) —of the keen feeling that he is deserted by human aid, but the Lord stands by him and strengthens him, and enables him to bear testimony to the Gospel before the Gentiles who are trying him—of his prayer for the timid friends who had left him. In all this there is much to remind us of the closing scenes of Stephen and of the Lord himself. And, if there be a hope expressed that his ministry is not yet ended, in the desire for the return of Mark,* (v. 11), who had once deserted him, but was now ready to be his “profitable” helper; and in the anticipation that he should yet outlive the coming winter (v. 21)—these will still not prevent us from regarding the Epistle as written when St. Paul saw that a speedy death was very probable, and therefore as containing what he wished to be his dying injunction to his son in the faith; “I charge

* And Acts xv. 38.

thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom.” *

Now if this inference be correct, it adds a peculiar solemnity to our text; it enables us to consider St. Paul's ministry as almost closing, in the words now before us, with an earnest exhortation quite similar in principle to that which ends the writings of St. John.† Each of these Apostles, as he sees his death draw near, seems to warn his disciples that they must beware of either impairing or adding to the doctrines they had been taught.

Our text, to be fully understood, must be read in its whole connection. The Apostle is speaking of the coming perilous times, and of the seducers or cheats, (*γόνιτες*)‡ who, after his death, shall wax worse and worse; not deceiving only, but being themselves deceived. And he points out, in the text, where his disciples may find safety: “Continue thou in the things which thou hast

* 2 Tim. iv. 1. † Revel. xxii. 18-19. ‡ 2 Tim. iii. 13.

learned, and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; and that from a child (from infancy, *ἄπὸ βρέφους*) thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation." And then follows, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works." Immediately after comes the solemn charge, how Timothy, thus kept from error, is to exert himself. "I charge thee before God and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Now, first of all, one or two points must here be noted in explanation of the expressions here used. By "the man of God," I suppose, St. Paul, here as elsewhere,* means, the teacher. The teacher has no more authority than the taught to seek his doctrine anywhere but in the old records of inspiration. And the teacher addressed is, in this instance,

* 1 Tim. vi. 11. Deuteron. xxiii. 1, &c.

observe, one of the immediate successors, nay, a companion of the Apostles. Again, when exhorted to continue in the things which he has learned, he is referred at once to the written word: and this is the more remarkable, because, in speaking of those Scriptures, which Timothy (through the care of his Jewish mother) had known from infancy, St. Paul must mean the Old Testament. And I think we must allow the same Old Testament Scriptures to be principally alluded to also in the following verses, even though we translate with our version, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God," and thus employ the passage before us in conjunction with 2 Peter iii. 16. for establishing the inspiration of St. Paul's Epistles, which are there classed with the elder *γραφαὶ*. Whether we adopt this interpretation as authorized by our version, or translate with others, "All Scripture given by inspiration is also profitable for doctrine," we must still, I think, hold, that it is the Old Testament, which the Apostle has here especially in his

mind, and of which he is speaking directly, when he goes on to say, that it is able to make the man of God perfect, throughly furnished unto every good work. But when, on the other hand, St. Paul refers Timothy, in the 14th verse, to his own instructions, he is speaking of what afterwards became the New Testament. When he refers to the then written word in the 15th verse, he means the Old Testament; when to the word spoken by himself and his brother Apostles, he means that divine preaching, of which the sole remains, we hold, as a matter of fact and history, are now preserved, in the written records of the New.*

And now, keeping these preliminary points in mind, we proceed to consider what lessons may be learned from the text for ourselves.

Of the various difficulties which beset the path of the young student of theology at this time, there is scarcely any more serious than the following. He sees on every side of him men of the greatest learning, ability, zeal, and

* See note at end of this Sermon.

goodness, whose course is pointed out to him, no longer as an example, but as a warning. He is told that, whenever he diverges from the straight and narrow line of the received theology, there is danger lest he stumble on some pitfall, and be precipitated into error. On one side Romanism, on the other Rationalism, are the words of warning which call him to tread cautiously. Nay, he is almost afraid even to move straight-forwards, lest the path, on which he has been accustomed to walk from his childhood, may itself lead him to some dangerous quicksand, on which there is no sure standing; and he is tempted, not unnaturally, to sit down in despair. This must often be the trial of many an inquiring mind, in times of much controversy. Especially the young and inexperienced, who feel that the grave questions at issue require much learning and soundness of judgment, and holiness of life, to settle them—who are accustomed therefore, in ordinary times, to walk supported by the guiding hand of those whom they respect

and honour—what are they to do in such times as these, when they hear such very different views of Christian truth advanced with equal earnestness by those who, if they did not uphold contradictory opinions, would naturally appear to be equally likely to have gained the truth ?

One of two consequences will very probably follow: the young will either be driven prematurely to investigate and decide for themselves questions for which as yet they have not the requisite information and experience; or will sink into a very uncomfortable scepticism. As the tone of theology around them varies so much, according to the society with which they are from time to time thrown, and they know that contradictory statements cannot be true, they are often glad to prevent themselves from thinking, rejoice to give up theology altogether, and will gladly take refuge in any other pursuit of literature or science which promises to divert their minds.

It is of course true, that there are certain

plain Christian duties which present themselves to every serious person's conscience in the position in which God has placed him; and that the best advice which can be given generally to the young in present difficulties, is to occupy themselves with these. It is certain that God will make their path plain to them, and lead them on, by His Holy Spirit, through the discharge of these simple duties, if they wait on Him earnestly in prayer, to a more perfect and assured acquaintance with what is His real will. But I would speak now, not so much of ordinary Christians, as of those whose duty would seem to summon them to somewhat more of a scientific examination of things divine. Those especially who look forward to dedicating their manhood to the direct teaching of Christ's word, cannot, nor is it to be desired that they should, prevent themselves from looking forward, with longing anticipation, to that which is to be their life-long business. They know that practical and speculative divinity are

indissolubly connected; and how are they ever to learn to be teachers of others, if they shun all thought of the subjects which they are to teach? It is impossible that the very youngest member of this university, who knows that in a few years he is to be called to provide for the spiritual wants of hundreds of souls—unless indeed he be wasting in thoughtlessness and sin those precious years which the Lord gives him to prepare for his overpowering responsibilities—can fail to inquire often in these days where sound theology is to be found. Nay, no intelligent man whatsoever, who knows that in some sphere of domestic or public life his opinions must directly or indirectly affect and guide others, will be able to escape this inquiry altogether. The answer to it is not easy; and the doubts and difficulties which gather round him will often make a man almost despair, as if truth were unattainable.

But even if, avoiding this temptation to mere scepticism or indifference, a man is forced to allow and feel that there is some

great and important science of theology, no small difficulty and danger of judging wrongly as to its nature, will still await him. If he is told continually, of the most intelligent and acute thinkers, whom he knows also to be men of deep piety, that they have fallen into some dangerous error, he will learn not unnaturally to conclude that it is their very ability which has misled them; and thus he will do injustice both to God's very precious gifts, and to the science which claims to be divine. If he believes that acute reasoning powers and a vivid imagination do but lead their possessors astray, when applied to the subject-matter of theology, he must concede to the scoffer, that whatever may be said of the practice of religion, its science seems to ally itself with dulness, if its sole office be to load the memory with the opinions of those who have spoken with authority, and, above all things, to avoid all vigorous or independent thought. But here would be grievous wrong surely to the noblest of all sciences, if the best powers of intellect were

to be supposed to find their sole legitimate field for development in treating of things profane. She who was thus degraded to be but a laborious drudge, could no longer be regarded as the queen and mistress of all sciences; and a total change would be wanted in the whole theory of the studies of this place.

I propose then to show that the rule which St. Paul has set forth in our text, calling upon his disciples to remain firm in the received faith, amid the seductions of enticing novelties, has nothing in it that is at all akin to dulness—that in the field which is still left open, there is ample room for the full employment of every best faculty of the head as well as heart.

The Gospel, it must be remembered, is in one sense both old and new. That is true of the whole of it, which St. John applies especially to its great practical commandment. “Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning. Again, a new

commandment I write unto you.”* Its truths and doctrines are very old, and yet possess an ever-springing freshness. For as when Christ came He revealed the God, who had been long known, in completely new relations, and enforced His commandments by new motives, so, even when He closed the source of revelation and exhibited the everlasting Gospel in its perfectness before the death of the last apostle, He endowed the holy books in which He caused it to be written, with a supernatural fruitfulness which speaks of their divine origin, causing them to unfold new stores of riches to the praying student every time he opens them, and giving them a power far above any contrivance of man’s wisdom to adapt their never-failing instructions to every new exigency in the history of the human race; so that to the end of time every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of Heaven must be, in the matter of what he teaches, as well as the form of his expressions, “like unto a man that is

* 1 John ii. 7, 8.

an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new," as well as "old." *

There is then one sense in which the Gospel admits of no novelty; another in which (as we have seen on a former occasion) it is ever fresh and varying.

But there are some very important distinctions which it will be necessary to take with us before we go further. It is granted that the Gospel is not so confined in its application to the mere letter and form of what is old, as to have lost its power of influencing men under a thousand changes, which, humanly speaking, in the time of the Apostles could never have been contemplated. He who knew all that was in men, and all that ever could be in them, intended His Gospel to be no unnatural system by which their best energies were to be stunted in their growth, while they were forced into a strange resemblance of outward look or stature; but He wished it to supply to all the principle of life, which was to enable their many varied

* Matthew xiii. 52.

powers to be put forth vigorously in His service. Yet when the Gospel is called the “faith once (*i. e.*, once for all, *ἄπαξ*)* delivered unto the saints,” and when, as in the text, we are exhorted to guard ourselves against unauthorized and dangerous novelties, by clinging close to the things which we have learned from the inspired Apostles and from the Old Testament, we are taught, above all, that the heavenly doctrines and principles of action to which we are to cling, are not so new in their adaptation to our varying circumstances as to admit of any real addition to the primal truth which Christ came into the world to unfold.

Doubtless, He who inspired prophets and holy men of old when He was causing the Old Testament seers to preach, and their teaching to be recorded through many centuries, while the light, dim at first, was as yet shining more and more clearly unto the perfect day—but who afterwards sent forth the Apostles to proclaim, during the short

* Jude 3.

space of only seventy years, that the sun was now fully risen, and that all the world might now rejoice in its unclouded light—might, if it had seemed good to his heavenly wisdom, have adopted another system. He might have inspired the fathers of the first four hundred years, or popes and councils, and a never-failing church, to develop the New Testament as the Apostles did the Old; but the proof of His having done so as a matter of fact is quite wanting, and no fancied analogy* can be adduced as evidence to outweigh

* For the way in which such fancied analogies have been employed, see Mr. Newman's *Essay on Developments*. In pages 108-110, the gradual development of Christian doctrine, in the successive ages of the Church, is inferred from the case of God having first commissioned Moses to demand of Pharaoh that the people might go three days' journey into the wilderness to sacrifice, and afterwards sanctioned his extending (developing) the claim into a demand to go with the children, and flocks, and herds, a claim which finally developed itself into a complete departure from the country, never to return. The same theological principle is inferred from the children of Israel having at first undertaken to leave Sihon in possession of the country east of Jordan; and afterwards, on Sihon's refusal to let them pass, having "developed" this original offer into a conquest of his territory. Could the author be writing seriously when he advanced these analogies? Bishop Butler would surely repudiate such an employment of his argument.

well-attested historical facts. Where miracles are wanting, there we have no proof of inspiration, and without inspiration it is impious to add to God's word. The principle is the same applied to the whole word, which St. John laid down with reference to his prophecy and Moses to his law: "If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book."* "Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you."† "What thing soever I command, observe to do it, thou shalt not add thereto."‡ Or, as Solomon says more generally: "Every word of God is pure; add thou not unto His words, lest He reprove thee and thou be found a liar."§ The principle is still the same: None may add to God's word but those whom He has directly commissioned and inspired; and we dare not allow that any are endowed with this authority, unless,

* Rev. xxii. 18. † Deut. iv. 2. ‡ Deut. xii. 32.

§ Proverbs xxx. 5, 6.

like St. Paul, they can point to the signs of their apostleship.

It is absolutely necessary for any sound system of theology, that a marked distinction be drawn between revealed truths and all which does not proceed thus directly and immediately from God.* For it is, as opposed to the old truths revealed, that all novelty must be error: where God on the contrary is silent, there He has not intended to prohibit man from seeking out the truth for himself. Men may differ in their judgments of what this directly revealed truth is. To some it may appear, and truly, that the Gospel is very simple; that it is all to be summed up in an enumeration of those few first principles, which are written in the Bible as with a sunbeam, of the truth of which, almost all experience shows, that every

* I cannot refrain from expressing my strong opinion, that the whole force of Mr. Newman's Essay lies in a studious endeavour to keep this distinction out of sight. Hence I believe that the book will have no weight with any except those who have had their ideas on the nature of revelation confused, on the one hand by rationalistic, or on the other by Romanizing, teaching.

really humble and praying student will be convinced by God's Holy Spirit from an earnest attention to the meaning of the sacred books. Others may have so accustomed themselves to refine away the plain meaning of the sacred text, sitting down to the study of it more with the captious spirit of critics, than as anxious humbly to be taught, that they may miss its heavenly meaning, and reduce it to a mere repetition, from on high, of truths already acknowledged by uninspired philosophy. Others again, and those perhaps good and holy men, never turning to the word of life with full desire to ascertain its true meaning, but looking at it always through the medium of some human gloss, to which they have been accustomed from their childhood, may think that it contains and proves many things which God never intended should be found in it. All these, each to his own Master, at the Day of Judgment, must stand or fall. Thus varying in our estimates of what the primal revealed truth is, we may not too strongly blame, though we may strongly differ from

each other. But this we are entitled and bound to require of all, who, either in theory or practice, would put forth a system of theology, that they treat nothing as a part of the Eternal Gospel, which they are not prepared, in life and in death, to maintain to be distinctly revealed from God. Otherwise they really degrade the majesty of divine truth, while they profess to elevate it. Every one knows that to see something miraculous in all the ordinary processes of nature, is much the same as to hold that there is no such thing as a miracle: and so also, to class all truths relating to religion as inspired is much the same as to affirm that there is no such thing as inspiration. He who would avoid an universal superstition, which is merely, after all, another name for a universal scepticism, must draw a marked distinction between statements which he holds to come directly from God's revelation, and those which he admits to be only human opinions, however true and admirable; as he must also between institutions believed to be

directly ordained of God, and those which have sprung up and been developed merely by the sanction of His superintending providence, however useful and highly to be esteemed.

Now the revealed truths of the Gospel, as opposed to which all novelty must be falsehood, are either themselves the great principles or major premises, by the application of which the Christian's conduct is to be regulated, or they are facts of God's nature and man's, by which such principles are proved. And God's almighty wisdom has taken care that, with all their simplicity, these are abundantly sufficient for the regulation of our lives. Every truth then, be it principle or fact, which thus stands forth in the word of revelation, or, again, which may be inferred by strict and accurate logical sequence from a candid and enlarged comparison of all the Bible's statements, may fairly be considered an integral part of the eternal Gospel.

These are the old truths, in the belief of which, Timothy is warned to continue stead-

fast; which are capable, indeed, of a thousand varying applications under varying circumstances, but which themselves ever remain certain and immutable; to fall back upon our convictions of which is the great safeguard against novelty and error. With these, man's learning and ingenuity cannot, without danger, tamper. It will be wise for him to find some other field than those, on which directly to exercise his imagination or acuteness.

But indirectly, even these afford wide scope for the application of human learning and genius; for there is a perpetual fund of never-failing interest in tracing their various combinations when applied to human conduct, and the modes in which they find admittance, and take up their abode as living principles, by the Holy Spirit's assistance, within the thousand different hearts of men. And such secondary speculations on such subjects are, of course, no part of the primal Gospel truth, though so nearly occupied with its principles.

But, moreover, beyond the range of such

truths altogether, there are many subjects of great interest for man, on which God has not thought fit supernaturally to instruct him; and these subjects, on which we have no revelation, are often so intimately connected with other points revealed, that passages occur in the Bible which may fairly be regarded as giving us slight hints to guide us in our thoughts of them, though it would be quite rash and illogical to say that on these obscure hints alone any certain conclusions can be built. Take, for example, the intermediate state of the soul between death and judgment. Doubtless, 1 Pet. iii. 19, and Rev. vi. 9, 10, 11, give some slight hints as to this state; but anything built on these hints must be merely human. Or, take again the particular mode in which the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is made available for the purifying of the soul. God has told us that the faithful soul communicating must receive a spiritual blessing; but as to the particular mode of blessing He is silent. Now, on this point, which Hooker*

* Eccl. Pol., book v. ch. lxxviii.

seems wisely to regard as, after all, one more of metaphysics than of religion, it has been thought that light may be gained from the few hints which the Bible contains as to the nature of Christ's glorified body; but any theory built on these is human merely.

Such matters as these are the great field of Rome's errors. Her teachers have taken (*e.g.*) that human theory on these two subjects which suits their own purposes; and, pointing to obscure hints in the Bible, as the foundations of their baseless superstructure, have attempted to force us to admire it as an integral portion of Christ's truth. But the error of the Romish Church in all this has lain, not in allowing theories to be constructed, but first, in constructing false theories, contradictory to other immutable principles of the Divine Word; and secondly, in claiming for these theories, which are false, an honour which would not have been due to them if true. On matters not forming part of revelation, men may speculate if they please in an humble spirit; but they can

have no right to confound their own fallible opinions with God's unchanging truth.

Here then, as in the particular applications of the general principles revealed, is a wide field for men's thoughts to exercise themselves with humility and reverence; not, perhaps, on such dark and subtle questions as we have now alluded to, but on those various other points where philosophy may well approach and illustrate the subject of religion: but the opinions or conclusions of human philosophy, however true, are not to be confounded with the Eternal Gospel which God alone reveals.

We may see then, I think, from these distinctions what the field is on which the Apostle will admit of no novelty. The Gospel is the same Gospel now, neither more nor less perfect than it was when St. John died; and it is in the immutable truths which the holy record of Apostolic teaching sets before us, that the text calls upon us to see that we remain steadfast. It is by testing all our human speculations by these,

that both churches and individual Christians learn to separate the chaff from the wheat, regarding all human teaching as part of the deceit against which St. Paul is warning us, if it shall be found by the humble inquirer, either in theory, or when carried out and developed in practice, to militate against these.

And now it will be seen also that the theological student need have no apprehensions lest, when thus summoned to follow the old beaten path, he must find his journey dull and devoid of all new incident, and giving no opportunity for the employment of his energies. To study God's word devotionally by the Holy Spirit's help, and meditate on the truths of religion for the direct benefit of our souls, is of course the highest employment of the highest element in man; but it is well, especially in such a place as this, that we should understand that in the province of theology the humble student will find full exercise also for the energies of his intellect.

It remains, then, to say a few words which may serve to suggest, with greater distinctness, how inexhaustibly rich is that field of study which still lies open to us. Of course, within narrow limits, nothing but a very vague sketch can be here attempted. Yet may even this, by God's blessing, be serviceable to the young, if, causing them to reflect on the great duty which the Lord Jesus Christ has laid upon them, to use all their best faculties of intellect as well as heart in his service, it shall stir up the zeal of any, more actively to use the many blessings provided in this much favoured place.

And here remark in passing, that this wide range of study goes far beyond the province of the mere professional theologian. Theology, in its highest sense, must be the noblest study for man as man, since it leads him to the contemplation and fuller knowledge of the Divine nature in its creating, sustaining, redeeming, and sanctifying powers; penetrates also into the deep secrets of the human heart; and is, besides, indissolubly

connected with both the outward and inward history of those great Societies, which, being the selected depositaries of heavenly truth, have, both in their faithfulness to this great trust, and their neglect of it, so deeply affected the destinies of our race.

It is, in fact, the most distinguishing characteristic of the system of this university, that it considers theology not merely as the professional study of the clergy, but, closely connected, as it is, with the only true philosophy, as the great master-science, standing to us in the same relation in which their philosophy stood to the Greeks—apart from which there may, indeed, be a disjointed communication of knowledge on particular subjects, but no education of the whole man. And those who would have our system in this respect altered, are surely unacquainted with the true nature of the divine science they are speaking of, and have never seriously contemplated the fact, that, in all ages, its truths have been the great motives that have swayed men,

and thus hastened or retarded the rise and fall of nations. When they would confine theological instruction to the clergy, these persons must be dreaming, surely, of some useless common-place book, filled with the names of forgotten heresies and the technical jargon of the schools, and can have no thought of the true divine philosophy: for those who know most of the nature and the workings of God and of man, with power to use this knowledge, must ever be the real guides of a nation's thoughts, and must therefore give its chief direction both to a nation's will, and to the events that spring from it. Such men do really control that flood which the mere politician can never stem, but which he deems it his highest wisdom to moderate, while he clears the obstacles that oppose its course. Who doubts that it is, not indeed the clergy, but in Coleridge's phrase, the cleresy—by which, I suppose, he means the great body of those especially who know most of the science of

human nature and have the power to wield it—that must ever be the real controllers of their fellow-men.

It was their exclusive possession even of a very imperfect form of this science, which, in the more barbarous ages, chiefly gave to the clergy a power that no physical force of kings or conquerors could control. The world seeks to train men to such knowledge on false and ungodly principles. To raise them to a pure and holy form of it, and thus endow them with a practical wisdom which the world's hollow philosophy vainly strives to imitate, and before which it falls powerless, is the grand object of divine theology in its fullest and truest sense. It cannot, surely, be of such science as this that the objectors are speaking, or they would never wish to shut up the most powerful of all kinds of knowledge within the circle of a priestly caste. Yet such is the real nature of that theology, to which, however we may fail miserably in practice, the whole theory of our education calls upon us to guide the young.

Such knowledge has obviously its deep interest for men of every class.

It is not unusual to consider theology as divided into speculative and practical—the one the province of the student, the other that of the professional pastor, or of every one who exerts himself in any pastoral relation amongst his fellow-men. Great exception may justly be taken against such a division, which seems at first sight to imply that it is possible for a man to form right opinions on religion without a zealous practice of them, or to practise its precepts to any real efficient purpose in guiding others, without some system as his rule. It must, of course, be granted, that a holy life is the great indispensable requisite for the formation by the Holy Spirit's help of correct views of divine truth; and that as all theories of religion formed in solitude must be tested by their applicability in the market-place, so, on the other hand, he who is perpetually occupied in instructing his fellows publicly in the resorts of men, must every day strive

to gain guidance and new life by retiring within himself, not for devotion only, but for study. The division, therefore, is not one which it is safe to encourage too much in actual practice. It may, however, be suitable enough for assisting us to understand with logical precision, the various subdivisions of our great science. Each branch of theological study must be subdivided according as we propose to view it on its speculative or its practical side.

“What,” says South,* “is divinity but a doctrine treating of the nature, attributes, and works of the great God, as he stands related to rational creatures; and the way how rational creatures may serve, worship, and enjoy him? And if so, is not the subject-matter of it the greatest, and the design and business of it the noblest, in the world? It has been disputed,” he continues, “to which of the intellectual habits mentioned by Aristotle, it most properly belongs, some referring it to wisdom, some to science, some

* Sermons, vol. iii. p. 31. Oxford, 8vo. 1823.

to prudence, and some compounding it of several of them together ; but those seem to speak most to the purpose, who will not have it formally any one of them, but virtually, and in an eminent transcendent manner, all. And now can we think," he says, " that a doctrine of that depth, that height, and that vast compass, grasping within it all the perfections and dimensions of human science, does not worthily claim all the preparations whereby the wit and industry of man can fit him for it ? All other sciences are accounted but handmaids to divinity." And this, I think, will be allowed to be no over-charged picture drawn by the professed theologian enamoured of his own pursuit, if we regard the science in all the breadth and fulness to which it swells when regarded as the enlightener and guide of human nature. Its sphere of study must be boundless, as its practical duties are inexhaustible.

In order to see the great extent of its range we might dwell first on the way in which this divine science may be used to hallow

those branches of learning which are merely preparatory and subsidiary to it. God has willed (*e.g.*) that the study of languages shall be necessary as the first step to enable us to feel any confidence in our attempts to understand the documents on which it is all built. And here in sacred philology is more than enough to occupy the labours of the longest and most energetic life. And when the way has been thus cleared, and we can understand the meaning of the words which are to be the ground of our foundation, think still how all the other preparatory studies of a liberal education seem each to fall into its own place as indispensable, before we can either ourselves add to the superstructure or even learn to appreciate or comprehend the labours of our predecessors. To confine ourselves still to the foundation—take any one portion of the Bible, even after the ordinary difficulties of its language have been surmounted, who shall be able without such instruction to approach to a solution of its many critical questions, to form to himself a vivid conception of its

historical and biographical sketches, or descend into its deep mines of philosophic thought? Nor, when we leave the mere foundation, can we have any difficulty in seeing how, as we go further, our ordinary human learning must, by the blessing of Christ's spirit, aid us in a science which above all others requires acute and practised powers of reasoning to detect fallacies, imagination and poetic feeling to soar to its empyrean heights, and practical sound sense and an acquaintance with the facts of history, to enable us to test its lofty theories by their effects on the lives of men.

As all human learning does to the faithful christian's ear, even in his earliest studies, echo the voice divine, so will the remembrance of it enable him the better to understand these heavenly accents when he is giving himself up entirely to dwell upon their sound. The very faults and ignorance, of his heathen teachers (noble even in their fallen state) help him the better surely to appreciate that truth which they were vainly feeling after.

Who sees not a heaven-taught Plato in the holy John ; a Stoic not of this earth in the enduring Paul ; who ever allows himself to speculate on the state of the souls in prison without thinking how poet and philosopher of the old times has wandered over the same ground before him ; and who can read the ninth chapter of the Romans without rejoicing that his own soul's eternal destiny depends on the resolves of his beneficent Creator and the Lord Jesus Christ, not on the iron laws of a remorseless fate which sways even God and all the universe ; or who reads the account of the wretched state of the lost heathen world in the first chapter of the same Epistle, without reverting in thought to the poet or the historian who tells us of the rock of Capri and the miserable old man who made it infamous by his lusts ? Here are one or two out of innumerable instances of the intimate connection of our common preparatory studies with things divine.

Again, when the theologian enters more

directly on the distinctly practical portion of his labours, what writer of biography, what sweet singer in our own or any other tongue, who has laid open the secrets of the human heart and gained an undying fame because his descriptions are true to nature, can be useless to him whose pastoral office it is to understand man's wants and the mode of their supply, to listen to the murmurs of the craving human soul, and give the food which God in Christ has ordained should satisfy it? What grave disquisition on the theory of the passions, or historical exemplification of the mode in which they work, can be useless to him who, while he treats of God and things divine, thinks of these ever in their relation to man, and cannot fully understand them unless he has mastered the science of man?

It would be vain to attempt to enter here on another field—the way in which the skilful pastor, bent on his Master's service, will endeavour to make his human learning the source from which he draws an innocent

relaxation for his people, that by Christ's help he may thus wean them from low pursuits, using the lecture-room or his school-house, as the week-day assistant to his labours in the Church. It would be vain also to attempt to do more than hint that our Lord's own example throughout the whole Gospels, as well as distinctly in the 13th chapter of St. Matthew, warns us how we must avail ourselves, in teaching, of all human helps, to give interest to the new forms in which we set forth old truths.

Passing by all these, remember, in conclusion, that theology has departments of study distinctly and peculiarly its own, which are almost boundless. These it would be useless now to attempt even to enumerate. Observe only, that so little are we in the habit of realising this thought, and so much ground of theological study remains still untouched amongst us, with all our vaunted lore, that the very names of many of these cannot easily be expressed in our tongue. Where amongst us, *e.g.*, is to be found

the systematic history of opinions in the Church, marking their development and corruption, and the various causes in history or philosophy that have called them forth at first into prominence, or caused them to be abused? And without such works how shall we expect to train the polemic to resist error, the most profitless certainly of theologians, but still indispensable in his sphere, as long as the revolving wheel, and the recurrence of the same causes, are sure to bring back old errors, though masked under new names?

Or, to take one more example. We are a great missionary country, and profess to be anxious, under God's blessing, at this time to provide more distinctly systematic instructions for the missionaries we would train. But how is the missionary to be well armed to go forth in his Redeemer's service, to combat with the many subtle forms of error which, in the great empires of the East, *e.g.*, are supported by the reverence and accumulated learning of hundreds of years,

if he has not studied the history and doctrines of false religions as well as of the true, seen the relations in which these doctrines stand to Christianity, and learned to know at once their weakness and their strength?

Indeed the field is boundless. The student ought to be under no temptation to think that he must stray into dangerous novelties in search of subjects that are to interest him. The danger is not the poverty of our science, but lest we be blinded and confused and unable to make any choice amid the superabundance of its riches. It is necessary to warn each one who would make real progress in theology, that he must select his sphere and labour in it zealously.

It only remains to call to mind, last of all, what danger there is when we thus speak of the science of religion, lest, however much we strive to avoid it, we may fall into the great sin of regarding the whole too much as a matter of speculation and intellect. Yet "God hath chosen the foolish things of this

world to confound the wise;”* and many an uneducated peasant, by the blessing of Divine grace, has a far deeper and truer knowledge of God, and Christ, and things divine, and his own soul, than the most learned and acute theologian. Let us then all receive this solemn lesson: that, above all his other labours and exertions, there is a great work laid on the student, from the fact that no man can be a truly great theologian who is not, by the Holy Spirit’s aid, endued with personal holiness. The principle is as true as the Gospel, that no one can understand the word of God who is not himself a child of God: hence the regulations of our colleges have wisely provided that these houses of learning shall be also houses of prayer. Here is after all the great work—to make personal progress, by the Holy Spirit’s help, in the Christian life. And the holiness required must be no poor compromise between conscience and worldliness, but something which shall really

* 1 Cor. i. 27.

resemble what it is called, the imitation of Christ crucified. This work no outward circumstances, no failure of health, or leisure, or other means, can interrupt: a thousand things may prevent us, however willing, from making progress as students; but this work is indispensable for us as beings with immortal souls.

NOTE.—p. 123.

I have dwelt on this point because persons often argue as if the concession, that St. Paul (in the words *ἱερὰ γράμματα* and *πᾶσα γραφή*) is here speaking of the Old Testament, would entirely destroy the applicability of this passage to be used in proof of the all-sufficiency of God's written word. It is often urged that verses 16 and 17, as thus used by Protestants, prove too much: if they prove the all-sufficiency of scripture at all, they will prove, it is said, the all-sufficiency of the Old Testament to the exclusion of the New. To this it is answered, that the Apostle is to be understood as saying directly, in verse 16, that even the Old Testament, properly understood, might furnish the man of God thoroughly: just as St. John says of the contents of his Gospel, that they are sufficient to secure eternal life for those who believe in them; but neither Apostle means to imply any exclusion of a future more full explanation of the word of life by other *inspired* teachers. What I understand St. Paul to be here insisting on is this, that the only security against error will be found by turning to *inspired* teachers—to the Old Testament and the inspired teaching of the Apostles of the New. It is not simply because it is *written* that we uphold the authority of the Scripture against tradition, but because being written, it is as a matter of fact the only existing record of inspired teaching. The true Protestant principle is the absolute necessity of tracing all those statements of doctrine to which we bow with implicit reverence to an inspired source, and the impossibility of so tracing any statements but those of Holy Scripture. And from this follows, as a natural inference, the all-sufficiency of Holy Scripture; for as a matter of fact and history, God has

given us no other inspired guide, and we trust His merciful and fatherly care of us not to have given us an insufficient guide.

This statement of the Protestant principle will show at once how fallacious it is to say that Protestants must go to tradition for their own doctrine of the all-sufficiency of Scripture. We hold Scripture to be all-sufficient, not on the authoritative decision of any Fathers or of the whole Church, but because, as a matter of fact and history, it is known to be the only sure record of inspired teaching.

APPENDIX.

APPENDIX.

I AM induced to add two very short Sermons to this series, as connected in subject with the apprehensions I have expressed, lest an insidious form of infidelity may, before we are aware of it, gain ground in this country. It is maintained by some that a marked tendency exists at present in reflecting minds to diverge into one or other of two extreme views, one of which passes necessarily into Romanism, while the other regards all Christian doctrine as a matter of complete indifference, teaching, that, provided a man rejects the decision of an infallible guide, he may unite with those who entertain any belief, however erroneous, if only they will profess a willingness to be led by Christ's example, and to act in his spirit. A confident hope seems to be entertained in some quarters, especially, I believe, amongst persons of the Unitarian school, that, as the logical faculty is more exercised, Christendom will resolve itself into two churches, one professing to be infallible, the doc-

trines of which are fixed and promulgated by one irresistible authority, the other embracing all varieties of speculative opinion on Christian doctrine; in a word including all who can "*ex animo* repeat the Lord's Prayer," the only formula, it has been stated, to which the adhesion of Christians can rightfully be demanded.

I will not stop to ask why a (so called) church which is to be thus comprehensive, should confine itself at last by adopting a confession of belief in dogmas concealed under the form of a prayer. I would rather most solemnly protest against the statement, that inquiry conducted in a reverent spirit is likely to lead to any such result. Protestantism is rightly a distinct and definite system, teaching indeed that the number of doctrines necessary to salvation is few, and that these doctrines, as living principles of action, may be held by many who cannot express them accurately in words, or who may choose other words than those to which we are accustomed, in which to clothe their belief in the truths we love, but duly upholding the majesty and paramount importance of right Christian principles, which it considers as but another name for right Christian doctrines.

That sort of pseudo-protestantism which is thus erroneously held up to admiration as the only true

antagonist of Romanism, must, I believe, at last, however little its advocates may wish such a result, end in spreading what is nothing better than a very insidious form of infidelity. If it has no rallying point but the Christian name, we must remember that that name is happily in the present day too much held in honour to allow even infidels to dispense with it. Men may be found who call themselves Christians now, who look upon the Gospel as a mere aggregate of unauthoritative legends, and its history as only valuable when regarded as the mythical exposition of certain philosophic truths to which the mind can attain without the aid of revelation.* It would indeed be a miserable prospect if there were no alternative but an unconditional surrender of our reason to the crushing tyranny of Rome, or embarking on this shoreless sea of indifferentism. But God will defend his Church; and the sure and positive gospel truth which has triumphed through so many ages, will not be lost now. As it is sometimes implied, in reference to this subject, that Dr. Arnold favoured such a view of the unimportance of correct belief, I think it right to record my conviction, that had that great man been now living he would have been

* For a clear exposition of such errors, see Trench's Notes on the Miracles, Preliminary Essay, ch. v.

in many ways admirably suited to destroy this very mistaken system. Few men who ever lived have had a more ardent faith in those doctrines which he deemed essential, or have more clearly understood and illustrated how Christian doctrine, if really believed, must affect practice. Surely any one who reads his Sermons, or follows the record of his daily life, must see that his whole soul would have revolted from a Christianity which was to teach no positive Christian truth.

I.

GOSPEL FACTS.

ACTS x. 39.

“We are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem : whom they slew and hanged on a tree.”

THESE words call our attention to a very important characteristic of the teaching of the Apostles. The passage from which the words come is a short summary of Christianity, given by St. Peter to Cornelius and his company. There are others of the same kind in the sacred narrative, and they bear, in many respects, a remarkable resemblance to what we call the Apostles' Creed ; giving us thereby a clear proof, that, whatever may be the real history of that Creed as a distinct formulary, it is well entitled to the name Apostolic, from its being so

very much a copy in substance, and sometimes even in language, of these statements of the Apostles.

One of the most remarkable features in which the Apostles' Creed resembles these summaries given us by inspired men, is the way in which it dwells on certain plain historical facts, and represents the belief in them to be a necessary part of Christian faith. It has been remarked, that this important peculiarity accounts for the introduction of the name of Pontius Pilate into the Apostles' Creed. We say, "Crucified under Pontius Pilate," to mark the date and locality of our Lord's crucifixion, and consequently the historical character of our faith; to record that we are not contented with any transcendental theory of a victory over the powers of evil, won by the Son of God in the human soul; but that we believe in our Lord's birth, life, death, and resurrection, literally and historically as facts. The form of some of those strange mystical errors, which, springing from the metaphysical subtleties of the

Eastern mind, vexed the Church in very early times, makes it probable that this historical allusion was introduced into the Creed for the very purpose here mentioned. Certain it is that similar errors of a mystical transcendentalism have appeared again in other countries in the present day, and seem not unlikely, in time, to corrupt the simplicity of the faith even in our own Church. Against all such subtle refinements of scepticism the Apostles' Creed contains a plain protest, warning us that he who does not believe historically is no Christian in the sense of St. Peter or St. Paul: nay, it would seem to be against the maintainers of such errors that St. John* is warning us, when he tells us, of him who denies that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, "that he is a deceiver and an antichrist."

In fact, every student of the New Testament must come to one of two conclusions, however he may try to conceal from himself the alternative; either that Christianity is no

* Second Epistle. Cf. verses 7, 9, 10.

religion at all as distinguishable from simple Deism, and that its sacred books are a mere cheat; or that it demands an assent to a number of distinct historical statements which it considers the basis of all its teaching, and without which it would be nothing but a name. The plain historical character of the faith which we are required to have in our Lord's life and death and resurrection, are shown, as in a thousand other places, so also in our text. The apostle speaks as a witness attesting facts. "We are witnesses of all things which He did, both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they slew and hanged on a tree. Him God raised up and showed him openly unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead."

Now why, it may be asked, do I insist on this in addressing you?*

The danger amongst us surely is, not lest any of you should refine away your belief in the facts of Christianity into a mere airy subtlety, which is the most

* Preached at Rugby.

insidious form of infidelity, because it has an appearance both of philosophy and of religion in it; but lest, while you fully acknowledge the facts of the Gospel as history, they have no influence on your lives. Such warning, it might be urged, may be needful enough for men in the maturity of their education, especially for men of speculative minds, but why force it upon you? The answer is distinct. It is our business, as Christ's ministers, training the young in this place, not to look merely to the boyish errors, with the temptations to which you are immediately surrounded, but to endeavour, by God's help, to store your minds with thoughts which, through His Spirit, will keep you safe in the shock of the conflicts of life. Against all bad principles, whether of unsound theology or loose morality, forewarned is forearmed. One of the greatest attractions of error is generally its novelty. It will fall powerless on the man who has known how its sophistry may be detected from his boyhood.

There is, however, another plain and more

immediate reason why this subject should present itself to us now. The holy season on which we have this day entered is a more than usually solemn and distinct commemoration of historical facts. When we call to mind this week* the testimony of the Apostles as to the various stages of the Lord's passion, it will be well that we should consider how really a belief in these facts is the basis and foundation of our faith.

This demand which Christianity makes on our assent to facts of history is a very important point of distinction between it and what is called the religion of nature. At first sight, we might be inclined to suppose, that, if certain great principles of morality and religion be admitted, the historical element of our faith must be comparatively unimportant. But all experience shows that this is not so, and a little reflection will convince us, that reason would itself suggest what experience thus confirms. The whole scheme of Christian doctrine turns upon

* Preached on Palm Sunday.

facts, for the atonement which has been made for the sins of lost man by the Lord Jesus Christ, was accomplished by His birth on earth, as followed by His suffering life, death, and resurrection. He who does not believe in these, cannot be, in our sense of the word, a Christian; neither can he know those motives of deep reverence, gratitude, and love, by which Christian faith is made operative. If we were to select one point as the most distinguishing characteristic of a truly Christian heart, it would be the feeling of a real and ardent reverential attachment to the person of our Saviour. But this feeling cannot exist in the heart without an acknowledgment of the facts of His history. We must know what He has done for us. We must see in him one who, first, being the Eternal Son of God, has left Heaven, and endured for us the worst sufferings of our mortal nature; and secondly, who has returned to His kingdom in Heaven, where He ever lives to make intercession for us. Without the first fact, which is indissolubly

connected with the history of His passion, the claim upon our gratitude is lessened infinitely; without the second, which depends on the history of His ascension, our gratitude must be cold, and cannot ripen into love, for we cannot recognise Him as our ever present friend.

Here, then, is enough to show us how the historical facts of Christianity differ from those of common ordinary history, in that they are the sources of the purest Christian feeling. The spark of holy feeling and of holy living will lie dormant in the soul till these facts strike upon it, and call forth its hidden warmth and light. And he whose heart is really humble and faithful will, by the help of God's Spirit, embrace the facts of Christianity as soon as they are presented him, for he will find in them, when really apprehended, the satisfaction of those longings of his spiritual nature which were never before able to find their proper vent. He that is of God heareth God's word; and the heart that longs for a Saviour

rejoices when it finds him revealed historically in the Gospel. A Christianity, then, without the facts of Christian history, is not only a system quite unknown to the Apostles and first preachers of the Gospel, but has also lost the motives by which they stirred men's hearts.

Brethren, we shall meet together in the mornings this week to have the historical facts of our Lord's passion vividly represented to us before we enter on the business of each day. For those who try to realize these truths, this week is indeed the holiest in all the year; and we are to mark the close of it by joining together in the holiest Christian ordinance. It may well be said that this week must be a marked stage in the Christian life of every one of us. We cannot be brought into that intimate proximity with our Lord and His sufferings which this time with its services implies—we cannot hear the summons given us this morning to prepare for the Lord's table, and the further exhortations to the same

purpose, which I suppose will be addressed to each of you in your several houses this evening, without being in some marked degree either better or worse. These things, intended by God's Spirit to stir our hearts to a deeper sense of sin, and a deeper feeling of gratitude to Him who will save us from it, must either be a savour of life unto life, or, if neglected, of death. Would that we could all of us, as we follow the spectacle of this week, think how deeply we are ourselves concerned in its history; thus would every smallest sin of unkindness, evil temper, indolence, self-sufficiency, or self-indulgence, appear indeed a thing to be hated by us, if we see that it could not be atoned for without the death of Christ.

II.

GOSPEL DOCTRINES.

PHILIPPIANS ii. 6-8.

- “ Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God :
- “ But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men :
- “ And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”
-

THIS remarkable passage was read in the Epistle for last Sunday, having been evidently selected as well suited to prepare our minds for the solemnities of this day.*

Some of you are aware that there has been considerable controversy as to the interpretation of it, and especially that the translation, “ thought it not robbery to be equal with God,” has been objected to. I am not going now to enter on the controversy, I shall only state my opinion, that the point

* Preached on Good Friday.

in dispute is one of comparatively little moment. The rival interpretations of the words *’ουχ ἄρπαγμὸν ἠγήσατο*, are that of our version, “thought it not robbery to be equal with God,” and that which the Unitarian writers especially, though not exclusively, prefer, “thought it not a thing to be grasped at that he should be equal with God.”

These, at first sight, appear very different ; but I repeat that the point in dispute is one of little moment, for whichever way the words are taken, the same doctrine must be inferred from them. As to our version, there is no mistaking its declaration of the Godhead of Christ ; “he thought it not robbery to be equal with God :” and if we grant, for argument’s sake, the propriety of the other translation, “thought it not a thing to be grasped at that he should be equal with God,” the same doctrine still follows necessarily by inference. For observe the context. The Apostle is inculcating a lesson of humility from Christ’s example : but what humility could there be in a creature not grasping at

equality with his Creator? The Being therefore who taught us a lesson of humility by not grasping at an equality with God must be himself divine. The doctrine then remains unaltered, whichever of the two interpretations is preferred. In the first, it is clearly and directly stated: from the second, it follows by necessary inference if the passage is to have any meaning. The words remind us then, taken either way, that the Being whose death on earth we are this day met to commemorate, is Divine, and hence its suitability to direct our thoughts to-day.

We had occasion to observe, last Sunday, that any true belief in the doctrines of Christianity, implies a belief also in its record of historical facts. It is very important to remark that the converse is true also: that the facts of the Christian history are dead and powerless unless accompanied by its doctrines. There is often great confusion on this subject. Men speak of Christian doctrines as if they were mere intellectual pro-

positions, mere statements of speculative opinion, uninfluential upon life and conduct. Such statements have, it is true, sometimes, perhaps often, been intruded into schemes of Christian doctrine; and the great majority of worldly men will hold even the holiest truths that ought to affect the heart in this cold intellectual way. But the true Christian doctrines, rightly held, are living principles of action, inseparable from our conduct, and give their whole tone and complexion to our thoughts and lives.

The acutest of philosophers has analysed that process of reasoning which attends on or precedes all human conduct; and from his analysis it may be shown that the mind is always swayed in action by the presence of a doctrine.* No man ever acts without a reason of some kind, *i.e.*, without a motive; that is, in other words, without a doctrine, whether it be good or bad.. For by the term doctrine, we mean the systematic statement of the principles of religion, and prin-

* Aristotle Eth. N. B. VI. ch. xii. § 20. Oxford, 1828.

ciples of religion are of course principles of conduct.* To say, then, generally, that the doctrines to which a man assents are of no importance, and that his conduct may be right without doctrines, is to maintain a contradiction in terms; for conduct is only called right because it proceeds from right motives, and right motive is merely another name for right doctrine.

But, probably, no one means to deny this, however vaguely he may express himself. What objectors, urging that doctrines are unimportant, mean, is, probably, that, though of course some doctrines (as those of natural religion) are influential in conduct, those of Christianity are not such. Men, they say, may be all united in heart and sentiment, if they believe the plain outward facts of the Christian history, without troubling themselves as to its doctrines. This would be very strange: the mere dead facts, surely,

* It is not of course denied, that what is essentially the same doctrine may be expressed in more than one form of words. It is the deep importance of the essence, not of the form, that is here contended for. The form has its value as the case which is to preserve the essence.

without the doctrines, cannot be principles of action: nay, they can have no influence on our conduct.

The mistake all through is obvious. The facts of the Gospel history, as they are themselves the sure means of eliciting the peculiar doctrines which our Lord revealed, in their turn can only be appreciated in their full proper significance, when meditated on and viewed in all their various bearings by the light which is shed on them from the doctrines they have illustrated and proved. We have both a historical and a doctrinal Christianity, and each in truth is essential for the other; neither can be fully understood or appreciated if they stand apart. Just as the New Testament would be imperfect if it did not contain both the Epistles and the doctrinal discourses of our Lord on the one hand; and the plain historical narratives, the Gospels, and the Acts, on the other.

Christianity without the basis of the historical facts of our Lord's birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension, must be a mere system of Deism; and these facts themselves

would be only more strange, not more divine, than those of any ordinary history, if they did not become to every faithful mind the illustration and proof of certain great Christian doctrines, which spring forth from them to be the directors of the faithful Christian's life. Without such doctrine as that of the text, there would be little in the history of the Lord's birth more than in that of Samuel—in his death, more than in that of Jeremiah—in his resurrection, more than in that of Lazarus—in his ascension, more than in the taking up into Heaven of Enoch and Elijah. But all things that are most wonderful in the various histories of the most chosen sons of men meet in Him, and illustrate the doctrine that He is the Eternal Son of God: and this doctrine presents his earthly history to us, as we read and dwell upon it, in a totally different aspect.

The general statement of this matter has too long delayed us from applying it to the especial subject of this day. The text sets

before us that great doctrine which gives the spectacle of this day its awful solemnity, and makes the events which were witnessed upon Calvary the crisis of the world's fate. Our Lord's whole life, conduct, and sayings, had been an illustration of this great doctrine of His divinity; and, on the other hand, it is only when viewed by the light of this doctrine that His crucifixion can be appreciated as the sacrifice for the sin of man; while again, it is when so viewed that His crucifixion assumes its proper place as the director of our lives. He who hung upon the cross this day was the same Eternal Being who had been employed by His Father to create the universe, and was destined to be at last the Judge of all; and who, at the time when He submitted to be thus rejected by his creatures, could have swept the earth and all its inhabitants into annihilation by a single word.

To say nothing of the enemies who caused the Lord's death, it will be granted, I suppose, that the Jews and Roman soldiers who stood

looking on, could not understand or make a good use of the event they witnessed, for want of any right doctrinal knowledge of who or what he was: It will be granted that even the Centurion's declaration only showed a good beginning of faith, which wanted further knowledge to make it really operative and acceptable: It will be granted that even the Apostles and the Virgin Mother could not at all really understand the mysterious scene, and appreciate its ineffable moment for the race of men, till from the Lord's resurrection and ascension, and the fulfilment of His promise to send the Comforter, they had learned the doctrine that He was indeed their God.

It is then from the doctrine of the text that the history of this day gains its deep significance: and thus explained, it becomes at once necessarily the turning point of the whole Christian life. It has been truly said that "the great and awful doctrine of the Cross of Christ (*i.e.*, of His death interpreted by the belief in His divine nature), may be

fitly called the heart of religion. The heart is the seat of life—it is the principle of motion, heat, and activity—from it the blood goes to and fro to the extreme parts of the body—it sustains the man in his powers and faculties—it enables the brain to think, and when it is touched man dies: and in like manner the sacred doctrine of Christ's atoning sacrifice is the vital principle on which the Christian lives," and without which the Christian's faith dies.*

Hence it is that from the event of this day Christianity has gained its usual name—the Religion of the Cross. The Cross has become its universal symbol. This day's history rightly understood, and the thoughts that spring from it, search the human heart, and stir it from its depths.

Brethren, let us endeavour in all our lives to show that we are influenced by it. Deep humility—a deep sense of sin—deep gratitude to the Divine Being who suffered and died as man to save us from sin—a gradually

* Newman's Sermons, vol. vi. Sermon 7.

deepening love of Him, and trust in His mercy, and desire to hold communion with Him—these are the necessary results which, by the Holy Spirit's aid, must flow from contemplating the history of the Lord's death by the light of the doctrine of His divinity. And in conclusion, think not that any one of us can become the subjects and recipients of such feelings, without showing that they have taken possession of us in our whole conduct. Young and old we all fall prostrate this day at our Saviour's cross, outwardly. If we do so in heart, we shall hate and flee from sin, and gladly seek on Easter-Morning to gain strengthening aid from the same Saviour in his ordinance, that we may rise with Him to a new life of holiness.

THE END.

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