SCRIPTURE AND TRUTH

DISSERTATIONS BY THE LATE

BENJAMIN JOWETT

WITH INTRODUCTION BY

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'JOWETT has been of use to me, because he believes in the great essentials—the life of the dead and the deity of Christ. What he says is very comforting, because he knows on what foundations our faith rests. Others have been most kind and sympathizing; but cut-and-dry sentiments, in which everything is taken for granted, do me no good at all.'—ALEXANDER EWING, Bishop of Argyll and the Isles: 1856.

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INTRODUCTION

THE Dissertations which are here reprinted turn principally on the Author's method of interpreting Scripture. They indicate the point of view from which he looked upon the sacred writings, both in themselves, and in their possible applications to human life in its religious aspect. With the exception of the first Essay, which is of general significance, they formed part of his edition of St. Paul's Epistles to the Thessalonians, Galatians and Romans (1855–1859). The Essay on Interpretation, though it appeared afterwards (1860) as a contribution to the volume known as *Essays and Reviews*, consists of a series of observations which had occurred to the writer in the course of the same long-continued labour. This Essay contains the noble sentences—to print them twice within the limits of the same volume can hardly be superfluous:—

'When interpreted like any other book, by the same rules of evidence and the same canons of criticism, the Bible will still remain unlike any other book; its beauty will be freshly seen, as of a picture which is restored after many ages to its original state; it will create a new interest and make for itself a new kind of authority by the life which is in it. . . . No one can form any notion from what we see

around us, of the power which Christianity might have if it were at one with the conscience of man, and not at variance with his intellectual convictions. There, a world weary of the heat and dust of controversy—of speculations about God and man—weary too of the rapidity of its own motion, would return home and find rest.'[1]

Though separated from their original context, and republished after so long an interval, it is believed that these writings will be found to have a lasting value. Much has since been thought and written in theology, and discoveries have been made, through which Biblical Criticism has been placed on more secure foundations. Perhaps, also, the errors of Bibliolatry, against which some of these Essays were directed, are less current, in the present day, than sacerdotal tendencies which equally make for obscurantism. But the spirit of Jowett's work, in which the purest love of truth was transfused with deep religious feeling, may still give encouragement to inquirers and comfort to doubtful minds. Learned treatises abound among us and devotional manuals and incitements are not infrequent. But the combination of learning with wisdom and of both with piety, of fearlessness with sobriety, of enthusiasm with clear judgement, of considerateness with openness of mind, has not been common in any age, and is rare in our own. Not the matter conveyed so much as the personality behind it, and 'the style

[1] Vide *infra*, pp. 50, 51.

which is the man', give permanence to compositions, which may in some ways come short of our present horizon of knowledge, or be not directly applicable to the mental requirements of our time.

The late Lord Bowen, between whom and Jowett there was a life-long attachment, once said of him, 'The Master taught us not what to think, but how to think.' The former method has an immediate fascination for many minds, and has often led to the formation of a school. The results of the latter mode of instruction are less obvious, but they are more far-reaching and permanent, supplying stimulus and guidance for all subsequent activities, theoretical and practical.

In an appreciative notice of the former volume,[1] one critic has remarked on the 'serenity' which is characteristic of Jowett as a writer on theology; and has quoted in illustration the concluding paragraph of the Essay on the Atonement. The justice of this remark would be still more evident, if the atmosphere of theological agitation and excitement, in the midst of which Jowett thought and wrote, could be realized by the present generation. The passage in question appeared for the first time in the *second* edition of the work on the Epistles, published in 1859. And it was the *only* answer given to numberless attacks. Moreover, as readers of the *Life of Benjamin Jowett* are aware, it was written under the stress not only of

[1] *Theological Essays*. By the late Benjamin Jowett. Oxford, 1906.

controversy and denunciation, but of ignoble treatment which impartial bystanders regarded as a species of persecution. That circumstance greatly enhances the impressiveness of a beautiful page:—

'In the heat of the struggle, let us at least pause to imagine polemical disputes as they will appear a year, two years, three years hence; it may be, dead and gone,—certainly more truly seen than in the hour of controversy. For the truths about which we are disputing cannot partake of the passing stir; they do not change even with the greater revolutions of human things. They are in eternity; and the image of them on earth is not the movement on the surface of the waters, but the depths of the silent sea. Lastly, as a measure of the value of such disputes, which above all other interests seem to have for a time the power of absorbing men's minds and rousing their passions, we only carry our thoughts onwards to the invisible world, and there behold, as in a glass, the great theological teachers of past ages, who have anathematized each other in their lives, resting together in the communion of the same Lord.'

The Sermon on Richard Baxter, which is appended to this volume, has already appeared amongst the author's Biographical Sermons,[1] and thanks are due to the authorities of Balliol College for their permission to reprint it here. It was one of the last of those which Jowett preached in Westminster Abbey, and I believe it to have been actually the last which

[1] *Sermons, Biographical and Miscellaneous.* By the late Benjamin Jowett. Edited by the Very Rev. the Hon. W. H. Fremantle. Murray, 1899: pp. 65–85.

he specially designed for delivery there. For of the other two sermons which he preached there after 1890, that on John Wesley was one of a series which he prepared for Balliol College Chapel, and the discourse on Bunyan and Spinoza was, at least in substance, the same which he had delivered in Greyfriars Church, Edinburgh, at a time when it was found possible for a clergyman of the Church of England occasionally to occupy a Presbyterian pulpit in Scotland.

In the Congregation which from 1866 to 1893 assembled in the Abbey to hear Professor Jowett each July, there was always more than a sprinkling of personal friends,—former pupils with their wives and families,—who heard him gladly. To them it was at once pathetic and inspiriting to listen to that silvery familiar voice in the evening of life expatiating cheerfully on the solemn experiences of Old Age. That impression was not soon to fade. But the preacher's purpose had a larger scope. It is observable that in the three sermons just mentioned the Englishmen whom he chose to celebrate had all in their lifetime been estranged from the Communion of the Church of England. 'They followed not with us.' And he desired to enforce the divine precept, 'Forbid them not.'

For in his latest years he increasingly lamented the 'Schism' which so long had separated the loyal Churchman from the pious Dissenter, and he strove in various ways to soften the asperity of the misunderstanding which held them apart.

In the Autumn of the same year (1891) in which the 'Baxter' Sermon was preached at Westminster,—during a distressing illness which he himself expected to have a fatal result,—he wrote or dictated as follows to his former pupil, the Rev. J. C. Edwards, who had been appointed to succeed his father as Principal of the Nonconformist Theological College at Bala in Wales:—

'I dare say that you remember the often quoted saying of Lessing, that "the Christian religion had been tried for eighteen centuries, and that the religion of Christ remained to be tried". It seems rather boastful and extravagant, but it expresses the spirit in which any new movement for the improvement of theology must be carried on. It means that Christians should no longer be divided into Churchmen and Nonconformists, or even into Christians and non-Christians, but that the best men everywhere should know themselves to be partakers of the Spirit of God, as He imparts Himself to them in various degrees. It means that the old foolish quarrels of science with religion, or of criticism with religion, should for ever cease, and that we should recognize all truth, based on fact, to be acceptable to the God of truth. It means that goodness and knowledge should be inseparably united in every Christian word or work, that the school should not be divorced from the Church, or the sermon from the lesson, or preaching from visiting, or secular duties from religious ones, except so far as convenience may require. It means that we should regard all persons as Christians, even if they come before us with other names, if they are doing the works of Christ.

'These are the principles by which the founders or restorers of a theological College may hope to be guided. They have not been often acted upon in the history of the Christian Church. But the best men and the best part of men have borne witness to them in the silence of their hearts.'[1]

And in the summer of the following year (1892), little more than a twelvemonth before his death, he assisted at the formal inauguration of Mansfield College, which had recently been opened in Oxford under Principal Fairbairn, for the training of Nonconformist Protestant Ministers. His speech on that occasion, which has been recorded, bears evidence of the same deeply seated desire. He said:—

'This is a great festival of union and reconciliation. I might go back into the past and speak of the time when, 230 years ago, a few words introduced into a formula divided the whole people of England against itself. Every sensible man knows that there were things done in the olden time that no good and wise man will now defend; and every sensible man knows, too, that it is better to forget them, and not to think too much of what happened to one's ancestors 230 years ago.

'Now let me draw your attention to points of agreement amongst us, not points of difference. . . . Do we not use the same version of the Scriptures? Are not many of the hymns, in which we worship God, of Nonconformist origin? Is there any one who is unwilling to join with others in any philanthropic work? However different may have been our educa-

[1] *Life of Benjamin Jowett.* Vol. ii, pp. 362–3.

tion, are our ideas of truth and right and goodness materially different? . . . The great names of English literature, at least a great part of them, although they may be strictly claimed by Nonconformists, do not really belong to any caste or party. The names of Milton, of Bunyan, of Baxter, of Watts, and Wesley, are the property of the whole English nation. This again is a tie between us. We may be divided into different sects—I would rather say different families—but it does not follow that there is anything wrong in our division, or that there should be any feeling of enmity entertained by different bodies towards one another. These divisions arise from many causes—from the accidents of past history, from differences of individual character, from the circumstance that one body is more suited to deal with one class, and another with another. Nor do I think that much is to be hoped or desired from the attempt to fuse these different bodies into one. Persons have entertained schemes of comprehension that look well on paper, but they are perfectly impracticable, and they really mean very little. But what does mean a great deal is that there should be a common spirit among us, a spirit which recognizes a great common principle of religious truth and morality. And as we begin to understand one another better, we also see the points of agreement among us grow larger and larger, and the points of disagreement grow less and less.'[1]

Between 1891 and the Essay on Interpretation there had been an interval of thirty-one years. But Jowett was the same man still. The love of truth

[1] *The Nationalization of the Old English Universities.* Chapman & Hall, 1901: p. 149.

and goodness in him overbore the limits of tradition and convention. Reality and not appearance was his persistent aim. And he sought on every opportunity to impart to others something of the spirit which had animated his own long and fruitful career.

Fifteen years have passed since then. But his words have not lost their power. And the need for them is not less to-day.

When the wave of mediaevalism and reaction that has submerged so many of our clergy shall have spent its force, the serene wisdom of this Interpreter may yet be audible in quarters where he would have loved to find a hearing. 'Being dead' he yet may 'speak', and call his countrymen away from barren controversy and idle speculation to the calm consideration of Bible truths and to the words of Him who 'spake as never man spake'.

Since writing the above, I have received from Professor Allan Menzies[1] of St. Andrews the following valuable estimate of Jowett's position in relation to the present state of Biblical criticism:—

'No doubt things are very much changed since he wrote. The greatest change of all is that derived from the new light thrown on the Old Testament by the discoveries of Wellhausen, Reuss, &c. In his Essay on Prophecy Jowett calls for a more satisfactory

[1] Author of *National Religion* (1888), and of *The Earliest Gospel* (1901): Editor of the *Review of Theology and Philosophy*.

account of the development of thought in the Old Testament, and shows that he felt the difficulties which have caused the new position to be thought out. Surely he lived to know that the prophets were found to be anterior to the law, and felt his earlier gropings satisfied.

'On the New Testament, the synoptic question has been wrought out statistically since Jowett wrote, and there is not much doubt about the main lines of the solution. But the solution, as he truly anticipated, does not solve every difficulty. In other parts of the field his words are remarkably true forecasts of the course of study since his time. What he says about the Greek of the New Testament agrees remarkably with the position held by Deissmann, Moulton, &c., that it belongs to the fusible spoken language of its day, and that to study words and grammatical forms too closely often leads to losing the meaning. The study of Aramaic as the language spoken by Christ is post-Jowett, and I scarcely think Jowett anticipates it. It is true the method remains largely a method, but a valid one, though the results are uncertain. On Hebraisms and the LXX., Jowett is quite in line with the latest writers.

'His great distinction as a Bible scholar is that he cares for the ideas and thought of the books. The attempt to build up the truth of Scripture by external methods, antiquities, travels, classical analogies, &c., has its uses, but is apt to take the place of what is vital. On the other hand the Classical revival has penetrated into New Testament Studies very powerfully since Jowett in the way of making the life and the problems of the New Testament Churches more real to us, and throwing on them the light of the religious ideas and practices which were general in those times. The History of Religion had hardly

begun in his day to illustrate the New Testament. But, suppose this done, the central work of appreciating the thought of the writers remains very much what it was; and here Jowett has very much to teach us still. I know no writer who has seized the essential Christian spirit in the books so purely and subtly.'

LEWIS CAMPBELL.

ALASSIO, ITALY,
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ESSAY ON THE INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE

§ 1.

It is a strange, though familiar fact, that great differences of opinion exist respecting the Interpretation of Scripture. All Christians receive the Old and New Testament as sacred writings, but they are not agreed about the meaning which they attribute to them. The book itself remains as at the first; the commentators seem rather to reflect the changing atmosphere of the world or of the Church. Different individuals or bodies of Christians have a different point of view, to which their interpretation is narrowed or made to conform. It is assumed, as natural and necessary, that the same words will present one idea to the mind of the Protestant, another to the Roman Catholic; one meaning to the German, another to the English interpreter. The Ultramontane or Anglican divine is not supposed to be impartial in his treatment of passages which afford an apparent foundation for the doctrine of purgatory or the primacy of St. Peter on the one hand, or the three orders of clergy and the divine origin of episcopacy on the other. It is a received view with many, that the meaning of the Bible is to be defined by that of the Prayer-book; while there are others who interpret 'the Bible and the Bible only' with a silent reference to the traditions of the Reformation. Philosophical differences are in the background, into which the differences about Scripture also resolve themselves.

They seem to run up at last into a difference of opinion respecting Revelation itself—whether given beside the human faculties or through them, whether an interruption of the laws of nature or their perfection and fulfilment.

This effort to pull the authority of Scripture in different directions is not peculiar to our own day; the same phenomenon appears in the past history of the Church. At the Reformation, in the Nicene or Pelagian times, the New Testament was the ground over which men fought; it might also be compared to the armoury which furnished them with weapons. Opposite aspects of the truth which it contains were appropriated by different sides. 'Justified by faith without works' and 'justified by faith as well as works' are equally Scriptural expressions; the one has become the formula of Protestants, the other of Roman Catholics. The fifth and ninth chapters of the Romans, single verses such as 1 Cor. iii. 15; John iii. 3, still bear traces of many a life-long strife in the pages of commentators. The difference of interpretation which prevails among ourselves is partly traditional, that is to say, inherited from the controversies of former ages. The use made of Scripture by Fathers of the Church, as well as by Luther and Calvin, affects our idea of its meaning at the present hour.

Another cause of the multitude of interpretations is the growth or progress of the human mind itself. Modes of interpreting vary as time goes on; they partake of the general state of literature or knowledge. It has not been easily or at once that mankind have learned to realize the character of sacred writings—they seem almost necessarily to veil themselves from human eyes as circumstances change; it is the old age of the world only that has at length understood

its childhood. (Or rather perhaps is beginning to understand it, and learning to make allowance for its own deficiency of knowledge; for the infancy of the human race, as of the individual, affords but few indications of the workings of the mind within.) More often than we suppose, the great sayings and doings upon the earth, 'thoughts that breathe and words that burn,' are lost in a sort of chaos to the apprehension of those that come after. Much of past history is dimly seen and receives only a conventional interpretation, even when the memorials of it remain. There is a time at which the freshness of early literature is lost; mankind have turned rhetoricians, and no longer write or feel in the spirit which created it. In this unimaginative period in which sacred or ancient writings are partially unintelligible, many methods have been taken at different times to adapt the ideas of the past to the wants of the present. One age has wandered into the flowery paths of allegory,

'In pious meditation fancy fed.'

Another has straitened the liberty of the Gospel by a rigid application of logic, the former being a method which was at first more naturally applied to the Old Testament, the latter to the New. Both methods of interpretation, the mystical and logical, as they may be termed, have been practised on the Vedas and the Koran, as well as on the Jewish and Christian Scriptures, the true glory and note of divinity in these latter being not that they have hidden mysterious or double meanings, but a simple and universal one, which is beyond them, and will survive them. Since the revival of literature, interpreters have not unfrequently fallen into error of another kind from a pedantic and misplaced use of classical learning; the

minute examination of words often withdrawing the mind from more important matters. A tendency may be observed within the last century to clothe systems of philosophy in the phraseology of Scripture. But 'new wine cannot thus be put into old bottles'. Though roughly distinguishable by different ages, these modes and tendencies also exist together; the remains of all of them may be remarked in some of the popular commentaries of our own day.

More common than any of these methods, and not peculiar to any age, is that which may be called by way of distinction the rhetorical one. The tendency to exaggerate or amplify the meaning of simple words for the sake of edification may indeed have a practical use in sermons, the object of which is to awaken not so much the intellect as the heart and conscience. Spiritual food, like natural, may require to be of a certain bulk to nourish the human mind. But this 'tendency to edification' has had an unfortunate influence on the interpretation of Scripture. For the preacher almost necessarily oversteps the limits of actual knowledge, his feelings overflow with the subject; even if he have the power, he has seldom the time for accurate thought or inquiry. And in the course of years spent in writing, perhaps, without study, he is apt to persuade himself, if not others, of the truth of his own repetitions. The trivial consideration of making a discourse of sufficient length is often a reason why he overlays the words of Christ and his Apostles with commonplaces. The meaning of the text is not always the object which he has in view, but some moral or religious lesson which he has found it necessary to append to it; some cause which he is pleading, some error of the day which he has to combat. And while in some passages he hardly dares to trust himself with the full force of Scripture (Matt.

v. 34; ix. 13; xix. 21: Acts v. 29), in others he extracts more from words than they really imply (Matt. xxii. 21; xxviii. 20: Rom. xiii. 1; &c.), being more eager to guard against the abuse of some precept than to enforce it, attenuating or adapting the utterance of prophecy to the requirements or to the measure of modern times. Any one who has ever written sermons is aware how hard it is to apply Scripture to the wants of his hearers and at the same time to preserve its meaning.

The phenomenon which has been described in the preceding pages is so familiar, and yet so extraordinary, that it requires an effort of thought to appreciate its true nature. We do not at once see the absurdity of the same words having many senses, or free our minds from the illusion that the Apostle or Evangelist must have written with a reference to the creeds or controversies or circumstances of other times. Let it be considered, then, that this extreme variety of interpretation is found to exist in the case of no other book, but of the Scriptures only. Other writings are preserved to us in dead languages—Greek, Latin, Oriental, some of them in fragments, all of them originally in manuscript. It is true that difficulties arise in the explanation of these writings, especially in the most ancient, from our imperfect acquaintance with the meaning of words, or the defectiveness of copies, or the want of some historical or geographical information which is required to present an event or character in its true bearing. In comparison with the wealth and light of modern literature, our knowledge of Greek classical authors, for example, may be called imperfect and shadowy. Some of them have another sort of difficulty arising from subtlety or abruptness in the use of language; in lyric poetry especially, and some of the earlier

prose, the greatness of the thought struggles with the stammering lips. It may be observed that all these difficulties occur also in Scripture; they are found equally in sacred and profane literature. But the meaning of classical authors is known with comparative certainty; and the interpretation of them seems to rest on a scientific basis. It is not, therefore, to philological or historical difficulties that the greater part of the uncertainty in the interpretation of Scripture is to be attributed. No ignorance of Hebrew or Greek is sufficient to account for it. Even the Vedas and the Zendavesta, though beset by obscurities of language probably greater than are found in any portion of the Bible, are interpreted, at least by European scholars, according to fixed rules, and beginning to be clearly understood.

To bring the parallel home, let us imagine the remains of some well-known Greek author, as Plato or Sophocles, receiving the same treatment at the hands of the world which the Scriptures have experienced. The text of such an author, when first printed by Aldus or Stephens, would be gathered from the imperfect or miswritten copies which fell in the way of the editors; after a while older and better manuscripts come to light, and the power of using and estimating the value of manuscripts is greatly improved. We may suppose, further, that the readings of these older copies do not always conform to some received canons of criticism. Up to the year 1550, or 1624, alterations, often proceeding on no principle, have been introduced into the text; but now a stand is made—an edition which appeared at the latter of the two dates just mentioned is invested with authority; this authorized text is a *pièce de résistance* against innovation. Many reasons are given why it is better to have bad readings to

which the world is accustomed than good ones which are novel and strange—why the later manuscripts of Plato or Sophocles are often to be preferred to earlier ones—why it is useless to remove imperfections where perfect accuracy is not to be attained. A fear of disturbing the critical canons which have come down from former ages is, however, suspected to be one reason for the opposition. And custom and prejudice, and the nicety of the subject, and all the arguments which are intelligible to the many against the truth, which is intelligible only to the few, are thrown into the scale to preserve the works of Plato or Sophocles as nearly as possible in the received text.

Leaving the text we proceed to interpret and translate. The meaning of Greek words is known with tolerable certainty; and the grammar of the Greek language has been minutely analysed both in ancient and modern times. Yet the interpretation of Sophocles is tentative and uncertain; it seems to vary from age to age: to some the great tragedian has appeared to embody in his choruses certain theological or moral ideas of his own age or country; there are others who find there an allegory of the Christian religion or of the history of modern Europe. Several schools of critics have commented on his works; to the Englishman he has presented one meaning, to the Frenchman another, to the German a third; the interpretations have also differed with the philosophical systems which the interpreters espoused. To one the same words have appeared to bear a moral, to another a symbolical meaning; a third is determined wholly by the authority of old commentators; while there is a disposition to condemn the scholar who seeks to interpret Sophocles from himself only, and with reference to the ideas and beliefs of the age in which

he lived. And the error of such an one is attributed not only to some intellectual but even to a moral obliquity which prevents his seeing the true meaning.

It would be tedious to follow into details the absurdity which has been supposed. By such methods it would be truly said that Sophocles or Plato may be made to mean anything. It would seem as if some *Novum Organum* were needed to lay down rules of interpretation for ancient literature. Still one other supposition has to be introduced which will appear, perhaps, more extravagant than any which have preceded. Conceive then that these modes of interpreting Sophocles had existed for ages; that great institutions and interests had become interwoven with them, and in some degree even the honour of nations and churches—is it too much to say that in such a case they would be changed with difficulty, and that they would continue to be maintained long after critics and philosophers had seen that they were indefensible?

No one who has a Christian feeling would place classical on a level with sacred literature; and there are other particulars in which the preceding comparison fails, as, for example, the style and subject. But, however different the subject, although the interpretation of Scripture requires 'a vision and faculty divine', or at least a moral and religious interest which is not needed in the study of a Greek poet or philosopher, yet in what may be termed the externals of interpretation, that is to say, the meaning of words, the connexion of sentences, the settlement of the text, the evidence of facts, the same rules apply to the Old and New Testaments as to other books. And the figure is no exaggeration of the erring fancy of men in the use of Scripture, or of the tenacity with which they cling to the interpreta-

tions of other times, or of the arguments by which they maintain them. All the resources of knowledge may be turned into a means not of discovering the true rendering, but of upholding a received one. Grammar appears to start from an independent point of view, yet inquiries into the use of the article or the preposition have been observed to wind round into a defence of some doctrine. Rhetoric often magnifies its own want of taste into the design of inspiration. Logic (that other mode of rhetoric) is apt to lend itself to the illusion, by stating erroneous explanations with a clearness which is mistaken for truth. 'Metaphysical aid' carries away the common understanding into a region where it must blindly follow. Learning obscures as well as illustrates; it heaps up chaff when there is no more wheat. These are some of the ways in which the sense of Scripture has become confused, by the help of tradition, in the course of ages, under a load of commentators.

The book itself remains as at the first, unchanged amid the changing interpretations of it. The office of the interpreter is not to add another, but to recover the original one; the meaning, that is, of the words as they struck on the ears or flashed before the eyes of those who first heard and read them. He has to transfer himself to another age; to imagine that he is a disciple of Christ or Paul; to disengage himself from all that follows. The history of Christendom is nothing to him; but only the scene at Galilee or Jerusalem, the handful of believers who gathered themselves together at Ephesus, or Corinth, or Rome. His eye is fixed on the form of one like the Son of man, or of the Prophet who was girded with a garment of camel's hair, or of the Apostle who had a thorn in the flesh. The greatness of the Roman Empire is

nothing to him; it is an inner not an outer world that he is striving to restore. All the after-thoughts of theology are nothing to him; they are not the true lights which light him in difficult places. His concern is with a book in which, as in other ancient writings, are some things of which we are ignorant; which defect of our knowledge cannot, however, be supplied by the conjectures of fathers or divines. The simple words of that book he tries to preserve absolutely pure from the refinements or distinctions of later times. He acknowledges that they are fragmentary, and would suspect himself, if out of fragments he were able to create a well-rounded system or a continuous history. The greater part of his learning is a knowledge of the text itself; he has no delight in the voluminous literature which has overgrown it. He has no theory of interpretation; a few rules guarding against common errors are enough for him. His object is to read Scripture like any other book, with a real interest and not merely a conventional one. He wants to be able to open his eyes and see or imagine things as they truly are.

Nothing would be more likely to restore a natural feeling on this subject than a history of the Interpretation of Scripture. It would take us back to the beginning; it would present in one view the causes which have darkened the meaning of words in the course of ages; it would clear away the remains of dogmas, systems, controversies, which are encrusted upon them. It would show us the 'erring fancy' of interpreters assuming sometimes to have the Spirit of God Himself, yet unable to pass beyond the limits of their own age, and with a judgement often biassed by party. Great names there have been among them, names of men who may be reckoned

also among the benefactors of the human race, yet comparatively few who have understood the thoughts of other times, or who have bent their minds to 'interrogate' the meaning of words. Such a work would enable us to separate the elements of doctrine and tradition with which the meaning of Scripture is encumbered in our own day. It would mark the different epochs of interpretation from the time when the living word was in process of becoming a book to Origen and Tertullian, from Origen to Jerome and Augustine, from Jerome and Augustine to Abelard and Aquinas; again, making a new beginning with the revival of literature, from Erasmus, the father of Biblical criticism in more recent times, with Calvin and Beza for his immediate successors, through Grotius and Hammond, down to De Wette and Meyer, our own contemporaries. We should see how the mystical interpretation of Scripture originated in the Alexandrian age; how it blended with the logical and rhetorical; how both received weight and currency from their use in support of the claims and teaching of the Church. We should notice how the 'new learning' of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries gradually awakened the critical faculty in the study of the sacred writings; how Biblical criticism has slowly but surely followed in the track of philological and historical (not without a remoter influence exercised upon it also by natural science); how, too, the form of the scholastic literature, and even of notes on the classics, insensibly communicated itself to commentaries on Scripture. We should see how the word inspiration, from being used in a general way to express what may be called the prophetic spirit of Scripture, has passed, within the last two centuries, into a sort of technical term; how, in other instances, the practice or feeling of

earlier ages has been hollowed out into the theory or system of later ones. We should observe how the popular explanations of prophecy as in heathen (Thucyd. ii. 54), so also in Christian times, had adapted themselves to the circumstances of mankind. We might remark that in our own country, and in the present generation especially, the interpretation of Scripture had assumed an apologetic character, as though making an effort to defend itself against some supposed inroad of science and criticism; while among German commentators there is, for the first time in the history of the world, an approach to agreement and certainty. For example, the diversity among German writers on prophecy is far less than among English ones. That is a new phenomenon which has to be acknowledged. More than any other subject of human knowledge, Biblical criticism has hung to the past; it has been hitherto found truer to the traditions of the Church than to the words of Christ. It has made, however, two great steps onward—at the time of the Reformation and in our day. The diffusion of a critical spirit in history and literature is affecting the criticism of the Bible in our own day in a manner not unlike the burst of intellectual life in the fifteenth or sixteenth centuries. Educated persons are beginning to ask, not what Scripture may be made to mean, but what it does. And it is no exaggeration to say that he who in the present state of knowledge will confine himself to the plain meaning of words and the study of their context may know more of the original spirit and intention of the authors of the New Testament than all the controversial writers of former ages put together.

Such a history would be of great value to philosophy as well as to theology. It would be the

history of the human mind in one of its most remarkable manifestations. For ages which are not original show their character in the interpretation of ancient writings. Creating nothing, and incapable of that effort of imagination which is required in a true criticism of the past, they read and explain the thoughts of former times by the conventional modes of their own. Such a history would form a kind of preface or prolegomena to the study of Scripture. Like the history of science, it would save many a useless toil; it would indicate the uncertainties on which it is not worth while to speculate further; the by-paths or labyrinths in which men lose themselves; the mines that are already worked out. He who reflects on the multitude of explanations which already exist of the 'number of the beast,' 'the two witnesses,' 'the little horn,' 'the man of sin,' who observes the manner in which these explanations have varied with the political movements of our own time, will be unwilling to devote himself to a method of inquiry in which there is so little appearance of certainty or progress. These interpretations would destroy one another if they were all placed side by side in a tabular analysis. It is an instructive fact, which may be mentioned in passing, that Joseph Mede, the greatest authority on this subject, twice fixed the end of the world in the last century and once during his own lifetime. In like manner, he who notices the circumstance that the explanations of the first chapter of Genesis have slowly changed, and, as it were, retreated before the advance of geology, will be unwilling to add another to the spurious reconcilements of science and revelation. Or, to take an example of another kind, the Protestant divine who perceives that the types and figures of

the Old Testament are employed by Roman Catholics in support of the tenets of their church, will be careful not to use weapons which it is impossible to guide, and which may with equal force be turned against himself. Those who have handled them on the Protestant side have before now fallen victims to them, not observing as they fell that it was by their own hand.

Much of the uncertainty which prevails in the interpretation of Scripture arises out of party efforts to wrest its meaning to different sides. There are, however, deeper reasons which have hindered the natural meaning of the text from immediately and universally prevailing. One of these is the unsettled state of many questions which have an important but indirect bearing on this subject. Some of these questions veil themselves in ambiguous terms; and no one likes to draw them out of their hiding-place into the light of day. In natural science it is felt to be useless to build on assumptions; in history we look with suspicion on *a priori* ideas of what ought to have been; in mathematics, when a step is wrong, we pull the house down until we reach the point at which the error is discovered. But in theology it is otherwise; there the tendency has been to conceal the unsoundness of the foundation under the fairness and loftiness of the superstructure. It has been thought safer to allow arguments to stand which, although fallacious, have been on the right side, than to point out their defect. And thus many principles have imperceptibly grown up which have overridden facts. No one would interpret Scripture, as many do, but for certain previous suppositions with which we come to the perusal of it. 'There can be no error in the Word of God,' therefore the discrepancies in the books of Kings and Chronicles

are only apparent, or may be attributed to differences in the copies:—'It is a thousand times more likely that the interpreter should err than the inspired writer.' For a like reason the failure of a prophecy is never admitted, in spite of Scripture and of history (Jer. xxxvi. 30: Isa. xxiii: Amos vii. 10–17); the mention of a name later than the supposed age of the prophet is not allowed, as in other writings, to be taken in evidence of the date (Isa. xlv. 1). The accuracy of the Old Testament is measured not by the standard of primeval history, but of a modern critical one, which, contrary to all probability, is supposed to be attained; this arbitrary standard once assumed, it becomes a point of honour or of faith to defend every name, date, place, which occurs. Or to take another class of questions, it is said that 'the various theories of the origin of the three first Gospels are all equally unknown to the Holy Catholic Church', or as another writer of a different school expresses himself, 'they tend to sap the inspiration of the New Testament.' Again, the language in which our Saviour speaks of His own union with the Father is interpreted by the language of the creeds. Those who remonstrate against double senses, allegorical interpretations, forced reconcilements, find themselves met by a sort of presupposition that 'God speaks not as man speaks'. The limitation of the human faculties is confusedly appealed to as a reason for abstaining from investigations which are quite within their limits. The suspicion of Deism, or perhaps of Atheism, awaits inquiry. By such fears a good man refuses to be influenced; a philosophical mind is apt to cast them aside with too much bitterness. It is better to close the book than to read it under conditions of thought which are imposed from without. Whether those condi-

tions of thought are the traditions of the Church, or the opinions of the religious world—Catholic or Protestant—makes no difference. They are inconsistent with the freedom of the truth and the moral character of the Gospel. It becomes necessary, therefore, to examine briefly some of these prior questions which lie in the way of a reasonable criticism.

§ 2.

Among these previous questions, that which first presents itself is the one already alluded to—the question of inspiration. Almost all Christians agree in the word, which use and tradition have consecrated to express the reverence which they truly feel for the Old and New Testaments. But here the agreement of opinion ends; the meaning of inspiration has been variously explained, or more often passed over in silence from a fear of stirring the difficulties that would arise about it. It is one of those theological terms which may be regarded as 'great peacemakers', but which are also sources of distrust and misunderstanding. For while we are ready to shake hands with any one who uses the same language as ourselves, a doubt is apt to insinuate itself whether he takes language in the same senses—whether a particular term conveys all the associations to another which it does to ourselves—whether it is not possible that one who disagrees about the word may not be more nearly agreed about the thing. The advice has, indeed, been given to the theologian that he 'should take care of words and leave things to themselves'; the authority, however, who gives the advice is not good—it is placed by Goethe in the mouth of Mephistopheles. Pascal seriously charges the Jesuits with acting on a similar maxim—excommunicating those who meant the

same thing and said another, holding communion with those who said the same thing and meant another. But this is not the way to heal the wounds of the Church of Christ; we cannot thus 'skin and film' the weak places of theology. Errors about words, and the attribution to words themselves of an excessive importance, lie at the root of theological as of other confusions. In theology they are more dangerous than in other sciences, because they cannot so readily be brought to the test of facts.

The word inspiration has received more numerous gradations and distinctions of meaning than perhaps any other in the whole of theology. There is an inspiration of superintendence and an inspiration of suggestion; an inspiration which would have been consistent with the Apostle or Evangelist falling into error, and an inspiration which would have prevented him from erring; verbal organic inspiration by which the inspired person is the passive utterer of a Divine Word, and an inspiration which acts through the character of the sacred writer; there is an inspiration which absolutely communicates the fact to be revealed or statement to be made, and an inspiration which does not supersede the ordinary knowledge of human events; there is an inspiration which demands infallibility in matters of doctrine, but allows for mistakes in fact. Lastly, there is a view of inspiration which recognizes only its supernatural and prophetic character, and a view of inspiration which regards the Apostles and Evangelists as equally inspired in their writings and in their lives, and in both receiving the guidance of the Spirit of truth in a manner not different in kind but only in degree from ordinary Christians. Many of these explanations lose sight of the original meaning and derivation of the word; some of them are framed

with the view of meeting difficulties; all perhaps err in attempting to define what, though real, is incapable of being defined in an exact manner. Nor for any of the higher or supernatural views of inspiration is there any foundation in the Gospels or Epistles. There is no appearance in their writings that the Evangelists or Apostles had any inward gift, or were subject to any power external to them different from that of preaching or teaching which they daily exercised; nor do they anywhere lead us to suppose that they were free from error or infirmity. St. Paul writes like a Christian teacher, exhibiting all the emotions and vicissitudes of human feeling, speaking, indeed, with authority, but hesitating in difficult cases and more than once correcting himself, corrected, too, by the course of events in his expectation of the coming of Christ. The Evangelist 'who saw it, bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true' (John xix. 35). Another Evangelist does not profess to be an original narrator, but only 'to set forth in order a declaration of what eyewitnesses had delivered', like many others whose writings have not been preserved to us (Luke i. 1, 2). And the result is in accordance with the simple profession and style in which they describe themselves; there is no appearance, that is to say, of insincerity or want of faith; but neither is there perfect accuracy or agreement. One supposes the original dwelling-place of our Lord's parents to have been Bethlehem (Matt. ii. 1, 22), another Nazareth (Luke ii. 4); they trace his genealogy in different ways; one mentions the thieves blaspheming, another has preserved to after-ages the record of the penitent thief; they appear to differ about the day and hour of the Crucifixion; the narrative of the woman who anointed our Lord's feet with ointment is told in all

four, each narrative having more or less considerable variations. These are a few instances of the differences which arose in the traditions of the earliest ages respecting the history of our Lord. But he who wishes to investigate the character of the sacred writings should not be afraid to make a catalogue of them all with the view of estimating their cumulative weight. (For it is obvious that the answer which would be admitted in the case of a single discrepancy, will not be the true answer when there are many.) He should further consider that the narratives in which these discrepancies occur are short and partly identical—a cycle of tradition beyond which the knowledge of the early fathers never travels, though if all the things that Jesus said and did had been written down, 'the world itself could not have contained the books that would have been written' (John xx. 30; xxi. 25). For the proportion which these narratives bear to the whole subject, as well as their relation to one another, is an important element in the estimation of differences. In the same way, he who would understand the nature of prophecy in the Old Testament, should have the courage to examine how far its details were minutely fulfilled. The absence of such a fulfilment may further lead him to discover that he took the letter for the spirit in expecting it.

The subject will clear of itself if we bear in mind two considerations:—First, that the nature of inspiration can only be known from the examination of Scripture. There is no other source to which we can turn for information; and we have no right to assume some imaginary doctrine of inspiration like the infallibility of the Roman Catholic Church. To the question, 'What is inspiration?' the first answer therefore is, 'That idea of Scripture which we gather

from the knowledge of it.' It is no mere *a priori* notion, but one to which the book is itself a witness. It is a fact which we infer from the study of Scripture —not of one portion only, but of the whole. Obviously then it embraces writings of very different kinds—the book of Esther, for example, or the Song of Solomon, as well as the Gospel of St. John. It is reconcileable with the mixed good and evil of the characters of the Old Testament, which nevertheless does not exclude them from the favour of God, with the attribution to the Divine Being of actions at variance with that higher revelation, which He has given of Himself in the Gospel; it is not inconsistent with imperfect or opposite aspects of the truth as in the Book of Job or Ecclesiastes, with variations of fact in the Gospels or the books of Kings and Chronicles, with inaccuracies of language in the Epistles of St. Paul. For these are all found in Scripture; neither is there any reason why they should not be, except a general impression that Scripture ought to have been written in a way different from what it has. A principle of progressive revelation admits them all; and this is already contained in the words of our Saviour, 'Moses because of the hardness of your hearts'; or even in the Old Testament, 'Henceforth there shall be no more this proverb in the house of Israel.' For what is progressive is necessarily imperfect in its earlier stages, and even erring to those who come after, whether it be the maxims of a half-civilized world which are compared with those of a civilized one, or the Law with the Gospel. Scripture itself points the way to answer the moral objections to Scripture. Lesser difficulties remain, but only such as would be found commonly in writings of the same age or country. There is no more reason why imperfect narratives should be excluded from Scripture

than imperfect grammar; no more ground for expecting that the New Testament would be logical or Aristotelian in form, than that it would be written in Attic Greek.

The other consideration is one which has been neglected by writers on this subject. It is this—that any true doctrine of inspiration must conform to all well-ascertained facts of history or of science. The same fact cannot be true and untrue, any more than the same words can have two opposite meanings. The same fact cannot be true in religion when seen by the light of faith, and untrue in science when looked at through the medium of evidence or experiment. It is ridiculous to suppose that the sun goes round the earth in the same sense in which the earth goes round the sun; or that the world appears to have existed, but has not existed during the vast epochs of which geology speaks to us. But if so, there is no need of elaborate reconcilements of revelation and science; they reconcile themselves the moment any scientific truth is distinctly ascertained. As the idea of nature enlarges, the idea of revelation also enlarges; it was a temporary misunderstanding which severed them. And as the knowledge of nature which is possessed by the few is communicated in its leading features at least to the many, they will receive with it a higher conception of the ways of God to man. It may hereafter appear as natural to the majority of mankind to see the providence of God in the order of the world, as it once was to appeal to interruptions of it.

It is true that there is a class of scientific facts with which popular opinions on theology often conflict which do not seem to conform in all respects to the severer conditions of inductive science: such especially are the facts relating to the formation of the earth

and the beginnings of the human race. But it is not worth while to fight on this debateable ground a losing battle in the hope that a generation will pass away before we sound a last retreat. Almost all intelligent persons are agreed that the earth has existed for myriads of ages; the best informed are of opinion that the history of nations extends back some thousand years before the Mosaic chronology; recent discoveries in geology may perhaps open a further vista of existence for the human species, while it is possible, and may one day be known, that mankind spread not from one but from many centres over the globe; or as others say, that the supply of links which are at present wanting in the chain of animal life may lead to new conclusions respecting the origin of man. Now let it be granted that these facts, being with the past, cannot be shown in the same palpable and evident manner as the facts of chemistry or physiology; and that the proof of some of them, especially of those last mentioned, is wanting; still it is a false policy to set up inspiration or revelation in opposition to them, a principle which can have no influence on them and should be rather kept out of their way. The sciences of geology and comparative philology are steadily gaining ground; many of the guesses of twenty years ago have become certainties, and the guesses of to-day may hereafter become so. Shall we peril religion on the possibility of their untruth? on such a cast to stake the life of man implies not only a recklessness of facts, but a misunderstanding of the nature of the Gospel. If it is fortunate for science, it is perhaps more fortunate for Christian truth, that the admission of Galileo's discovery has for ever settled the principle of the relations between them.

A similar train of thought may be extended to the

results of historical inquiries. These results cannot be barred by the dates or narrative of Scripture; neither should they be made to wind round into agreement with them. Again, the idea of inspiration must expand and take them in. Their importance in a religious point of view is not that they impugn or confirm the Jewish history, but that they show more clearly the purposes of God towards the whole human race. The recent chronological discoveries from Egyptian monuments do not tend to overthrow revelation, nor the Ninevite inscriptions to support it. The use of them on either side may indeed arouse a popular interest in them; it is apt to turn a scientific inquiry into a semi-religious controversy. And to religion either use is almost equally injurious, because seeming to rest truths important to human life on the mere accident of an archaeological discovery. Is it to be thought that Christianity gains anything from the deciphering of the names of some Assyrian and Babylonian kings, contemporaries chiefly with the later Jewish history? As little as it ought to lose from the appearance of a contradictory narrative of the Exodus in the chamber of an Egyptian temple of the year B.C. 1500. This latter supposition may not be very probable. But it is worth while to ask ourselves the question, whether we can be right in maintaining any view of religion which can be affected by such a probability.

It will be a further assistance in the consideration of this subject, to observe that the interpretation of Scripture has nothing to do with any opinion respecting its origin. The meaning of Scripture is one thing; the inspiration of Scripture is another. It is conceivable that those who hold the most different views about the one, may be able to agree about the other. Rigid upholders of the verbal inspiration of

Scripture, and those who deny inspiration altogether, may nevertheless meet on the common ground of the meaning of words. If the term inspiration were to fall into disuse, no fact of nature, or history, or language, no event in the life of man, or dealings of God with him, would be in any degree altered. The word itself is but of yesterday, not found in the earlier confessions of the reformed faith; the difficulties that have arisen about it are only two or three centuries old. Therefore the question of inspiration, though in one sense important, is to the interpreter as though it were not important; he is in no way called upon to determine a matter with which he has nothing to do, and which was not determined by fathers of the Church. And he had better go on his way and leave the more precise definition of the word to the progress of knowledge and the results of the study of Scripture, instead of entangling himself with a theory about it.

It is one evil of conditions or previous suppositions in the study of Scripture, that the assumption of them has led to an apologetic temper in the interpreters of Scripture. The tone of apology is always a tone of weakness, and does injury to a good cause. It is the reverse of 'ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free'. It is hampered with the necessity of making a defence, and also with previous defences of the same side; it accepts, with an excess of reserve and caution, the truth itself, when it comes from an opposite quarter. Commentators are often more occupied with the proof of miracles than with the declaration of life and immortality; with the fulfilment of the details of prophecy than with its life and power; with the reconcilement of the discrepancies in the narrative of the infancy, pointed out by Schleiermacher, than with the importance of the

great event of the appearance of the Saviour—'*To this end was I born and for this cause came I into the world that I should bear witness unto the truth.*' The same tendency is observable also in reference to the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles, which are not only brought into harmony with each other, but interpreted with a reference to the traditions of existing communions. The natural meaning of particular expressions, as for example: 'Why are they then baptized for the dead?' (1 Cor. xv. 29), or the words 'because of the angels' (1 Cor. xi. 10); or, 'this generation shall not pass away until all these things be fulfilled' (Matt. xxiv. 34); or, 'upon this rock will I build my Church' (Matt. xvi. 18), is set aside in favour of others, which, however improbable, are more in accordance with preconceived opinions, or seem to be more worthy of the sacred writers. The language, and also the text, are treated on the same defensive and conservative principles. The received translations of Phil. ii. 6 ('Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God'), or of Rom. iii. 25 ('Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood'), or Rom. xv. 6 ('God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ'), though erroneous, are not given up without a struggle; the 1 Tim. iii. 16, and 1 John v. 7 (the three witnesses), though the first ('God manifest in the flesh,' ΘΣ for ΟΣ) is not found in the best manuscripts, and the second in no Greek manuscript worth speaking of, have not yet disappeared from the editions of the Greek Testament commonly in use in England, and still less from the English translation. An English commentator who, with Lachmann and Tischendorf, supported also by the authority of Erasmus, ventures to alter the punctuation of the doxology in Rom. ix. 5 ('Who is over all God blessed

for ever') hardly escapes the charge of heresy. That in most of these cases the words referred to have a direct bearing on important controversies is a reason not for retaining, but for correcting them.

The temper of accommodation shows itself especially in two ways: first, in the attempt to adapt the truths of Scripture to the doctrines of the creeds; secondly, in the adaptation of the precepts and maxims of Scripture to the language or practice of our own age. Now the creeds are acknowledged to be a part of Christianity; they stand in a close relation to the words of Christ and His Apostles; nor can it be said that any heterodox formula makes a nearer approach to a simple and scriptural rule of faith. Neither is anything gained by contrasting them with Scripture, in which the germs of the expressions used in them are sufficiently apparent. Yet it does not follow that they should be pressed into the service of the interpreter. The growth of ideas in the interval which separated the first century from the fourth or sixth makes it impossible to apply the language of the one to the explanation of the other. Between Scripture and the Nicene or Athanasian Creed, a world of the understanding comes in—that world of abstractions and second notions; and mankind are no longer at the same point as when the whole of Christianity was contained in the words, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou mayest be saved,' when the Gospel centred in the attachment to a living or recently departed friend and Lord. The language of the New Testament is the first utterance and consciousness of the mind of Christ; or the immediate vision of the Word of life (1 John i. 1) as it presented itself before the eyes of His first followers, or as the sense of His truth and power grew upon them (Rom. i. 3, 4); the other is the result of three

or four centuries of reflection and controversy. And although this last had a truth suited to its age, and its technical expressions have sunk deep into the heart of the human race, it is not the less unfitted to be the medium by the help of which Scripture is to be explained. If the occurrence of the phraseology of the Nicene age in a verse of the Epistles would detect the spuriousness of the verse in which it was found, how can the Nicene or Athanasian Creed be a suitable instrument for the interpretation of Scripture? That advantage which the New Testament has over the teaching of the Church, as representing what may be termed the childhood of the Gospel, would be lost if its language were required to conform to that of the Creeds.

To attribute to St. Paul or the Twelve the abstract notion of Christian truth which afterwards sprang up in the Catholic Church, is the same sort of anachronism as to attribute to them a system of philosophy. It is the same error as to attribute to Homer the ideas of Thales or Heraclitus, or to Thales the more developed principles of Aristotle and Plato. Many persons who have no difficulty in tracing the growth of institutions, yet seem to fail in recognizing the more subtle progress of an idea. It is hard to imagine the absence of conceptions with which we are familiar; to go back to the germ of what we know only in maturity; to give up what has grown to us, and become a part of our minds. In the present case, however, the development is not difficult to prove. The statements of Scripture are unaccountable if we deny it; the silence of Scripture is equally unaccountable. Absorbed as St. Paul was in the person of Christ with an intensity of faith and love of which in modern days and at this distance of time we can scarcely form a conception—high as he raised the

dignity of his Lord above all things in heaven and earth—looking to Him as the Creator of all things, and the head of quick and dead, he does not speak of Him as 'equal to the Father', or 'of one substance with the Father'. Much of the language of the Epistles (passages for example such as Rom. i. 2: Phil. ii. 6) would lose their meaning if distributed in alternate clauses between our Lord's humanity and divinity. Still greater difficulties would be introduced into the Gospels by the attempt to identify them with the Creeds. We should have to suppose that He was and was not tempted; that when He prayed to His Father He prayed also to Himself; that He knew and did not know 'of that hour' of which He as well as the angels were ignorant. How could He have said, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me'? or, 'Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me'? How could He have doubted whether 'when the Son cometh he shall find faith upon the earth'? These simple and touching words have to be taken out of their natural meaning and connexion to be made the theme of apologetic discourses if we insist on reconciling them with the distinctions of later ages.

Neither, as has been already remarked, would the substitution of any other precise or definite rule of faith, as for example the Unitarian, be more favourable to the interpretation of Scripture. How could the Evangelist St. John have said 'the Word was God', or 'God was the Word' (according to either mode of translating), or how would our Lord Himself have said, 'I and the Father are one,' if either had meant that Christ was a mere man, 'a prophet or as one of the prophets'? No one who takes words in their natural sense can suppose that 'in the beginning' (John i. 1) means, 'at the commencement of the

ministry of Christ,' or that 'the Word was with God', only relates 'to the withdrawal of Christ to commune with God', or that 'the Word is said to be God', in the ironical sense of John x. 35. But while venturing to turn one eye on these (perhaps obsolete) perversions of the meanings of words in old opponents, we must not forget also to keep the other open to our own. The object of the preceding remark is not to enter into controversy with them, or to balance the statements of one side with those of the other, but only to point out the error of introducing into the interpretation of Scripture the notions of a later age which is common alike to us and them.

The other kind of accommodation which was alluded to above arises out of the difference between the social and ecclesiastical state of the world, as it exists in actual fact, and the ideal which the Gospel presents to us. An ideal is, by its very nature, far removed from actual life. It is enshrined not in the material things of the external world, but in the heart and conscience. Mankind are dissatisfied at this separation; they fancy that they can make the inward kingdom an outward one also. But this is not possible. The frame of civilization, that is to say, institutions and laws, the usages of business, the customs of society, these are for the most part mechanical, capable only in a certain degree of a higher and spiritual life. Christian motives have never existed in such strength, as to make it safe or possible to entrust them with the preservation of social order. Other interests are therefore provided and other principles, often independent of the teaching of the Gospel, or even apparently at variance with it. 'If a man smite thee on the right cheek turn to him the other also,' is not a regulation of police but an ideal rule of conduct, not to be

explained away, but rarely if ever to be literally acted upon in a civilized country; or rather to be acted upon always in spirit, yet not without a reference to the interests of the community. If a missionary were to endanger the public peace and come like the Apostles saying, 'I ought to obey God rather than man,' it is obvious that the most Christian of magistrates could not allow him (say in India or New Zealand) to shield himself under the authority of these words. For in religion as in philosophy there are two opposite poles; of truth and action, of doctrine and practice, of idea and fact. The image of God in Christ is over against the necessities of human nature and the state of man on earth. Our Lord Himself recognizes this distinction, when He says, 'Of whom do the kings of the earth gather tribute?' and 'then are the children free' (Matt. xvii. 26). And again, 'Notwithstanding lest we should offend them,' &c. Here are contrasted what may be termed the two poles of idea and fact.

All men appeal to Scripture, and desire to draw the authority of Scripture to their side; its voice may be heard in the turmoil of political strife; a merely verbal similarity, the echo of a word, has weight in the determination of a controversy. Such appeals are not to be met always by counter-appeals; they rather lead to the consideration of deeper questions as to the manner in which Scripture is to be applied. In what relation does it stand to actual life? Is it a law, or only a spirit? for nations, or for individuals? to be enforced generally, or in details also? Are its maxims to be modified by experience, or acted upon in defiance of experience? Are the accidental circumstances of the first believers to become a rule for us? Is everything, in short, done or said by our Saviour and His Apostles, to be re-

garded as a precept or example which is to be followed on all occasions and to last for all time? That can hardly be, consistently with the changes of human things. It would be a rigid skeleton of Christianity (not the image of Christ), to which society and politics, as well as the lives of individuals, would be conformed. It would be the oldness of the letter, on which the world would be stretched; not 'the law of the spirit of life' which St. Paul teaches. The attempt to force politics and law into the framework of religion is apt to drive us up into a corner, in which the great principles of truth and justice have no longer room to make themselves felt. It is better, as well as safer, to take the liberty with which Christ has made us free. For our Lord Himself has left behind Him words, which contain a principle large enough to admit all the forms of society or of life; 'My kingdom is not of this world' (John xviii. 36). It does not come into collision with politics or knowledge; it has nothing to do with the Roman government or the Jewish priesthood, or with corresponding institutions in the present day; it is a counsel of perfection, and has its dwelling-place in the heart of man. That is the real solution of questions of Church and State; all else is relative to the history or circumstances of particular nations. That is the answer to a doubt which is also raised respecting the obligation of the letter of the Gospel on individual Christians. But this inwardness of the words of Christ is what few are able to receive; it is easier to apply them superficially to things without, than to be a partaker of them from within. And false and miserable applications of them are often made, and the kingdom of God becomes the tool of the kingdoms of the world.

The neglect of this necessary contrast between the

ideal and the actual has had a twofold effect on the Interpretation of Scripture. It has led to an unfair appropriation of some portions of Scripture and an undue neglect of others. The letter is in many cases really or apparently in harmony with existing practices, or opinions, or institutions. In other cases it is far removed from them; it often seems as if the world would come to an end before the words of Scripture could be realized. The twofold effect just now mentioned, corresponds to these two classes. Some texts of Scripture have been eagerly appealed to and made (in one sense) too much of; they have been taken by force into the service of received opinions and beliefs; texts of the other class have been either unnoticed or explained away. Consider, for example, the extraordinary and unreasonable importance attached to single words, sometimes of doubtful meaning, in reference to any of the following subjects:—(1) Divorce; (2) Marriage with a Wife's Sister; (3) Inspiration; (4) the Personality of the Holy Spirit; (5) Infant Baptism; (6) Episcopacy; (7) Divine Right of Kings; (8) Original Sin. There is, indeed, a kind of mystery in the way in which the chance words of a simple narrative, the occurrence of some accidental event, the use even of a figure of speech, or a mistranslation of a word in Latin or English, have affected the thoughts of future ages and distant countries. Nothing so slight that it has not been caught at; nothing so plain that it may not be explained away. What men have brought to the text they have also found there; what has received no interpretation or witness, either in the customs of the Church or in 'the thoughts of many hearts', is still 'an unknown tongue' to them. It is with Scripture as with oratory, its effect partly depends on the preparation in the mind or in circumstances for

the reception of it. There is no use of Scripture, no quotation or even misquotation of a word which is not a power in the world, when it embodies the spirit of a great movement or is echoed by the voice of a large party.

(1) On the first of the subjects referred to above, it is argued from Scripture that adulterers should not be allowed to marry again; and the point of the argument turns on the question whether the words (ἐκτὸς λόγου πορνείας) 'saving for the cause of fornication', which occur in the first clause of an important text on marriage, were designedly or accidentally omitted in the second (Matt. v. 32: 'Whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery, and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery'; compare also Mark x. 11, 12). (2) The Scripture argument in the second instance is almost invisible, being drawn from a passage the meaning of which is irrelevant (Lev. xviii. 18: 'Neither shalt thou take a wife to her sister to vex her, to uncover her nakedness beside the other in her lifetime'): and transferred from the Polygamy which prevailed in Eastern countries 3000 years ago to the Monogamy of the nineteenth century and the Christian Church, in spite of the custom and tradition of the Jews and the analogy of the brother's widow. (3) In the third case the word (θεόπνευστος) 'given by inspiration of God' is spoken of the Old Testament, and is assumed to apply to the New, including that Epistle in which the expression occurs (2 Tim. iii. 16). (4) In the fourth example the words used are mysterious (John xiv. 26; xvi. 15), and seem to come out of the depths of a divine consciousness; they have sometimes, however, received a more exact meaning than they would truly bear; what is spoken in a figure is construed

with the severity of a logical statement, while passages of an opposite tenour are overlooked or set aside. (5) In the fifth instance, the mere mention of a family of a jailer at Philippi who was baptized ('he and all his,' Acts xvi. 33), has led to the inference that in this family there were probably young children, and hence that infant baptism is, first, permissive, secondly, obligatory. (6) In the sixth case the chief stress of the argument from Scripture turns on the occurrence of the word (ἐπίσκοπος) bishop, in the Epistles to Timothy and Titus, which is assisted by a supposed analogy between the position of the Apostles and of their successors; although the term bishop is clearly used in the passages referred to as well as in other parts of the New Testament indistinguishably from Presbyter, and the magisterial authority of bishops in after ages is unlike rather than like the personal authority of the Apostles in the beginning of the Gospel. The further development of Episcopacy into Apostolical succession has often been rested on the promise, 'Lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world.' (7) In the seventh case the precepts of order which are addressed in the Epistle to the 'fifth monarchy men of those days', are transferred to a duty of obedience to hereditary princes; the fact of the house of David, 'the Lord's anointed,' sitting on the throne of Israel is converted into a principle for all times and countries. And the higher lesson which our Saviour teaches: 'Render unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's,' that is to say, 'Render unto all their due, and to God above all,' is spoiled by being made into a precept of political subjection. (8) Lastly, the justice of God 'who rewardeth every man according to his works', and the Christian scheme of redemption, have been staked on two figurative expressions of

St. Paul to which there is no parallel in any other part of Scripture (1 Cor. xv. 22: 'For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive,' and the corresponding passage in Rom. v. 12); notwithstanding the declaration of the Old Testament as also of the New, 'Every soul shall bear its own iniquity,' and 'neither this man sinned nor his parents'. It is not necessary for our purpose to engage further in the matters of dispute which have arisen by the way in attempting to illustrate the general argument. Yet to avoid misconception it may be remarked, that many of the principles, rules, or truths mentioned, as for example, Infant Baptism, or the Episcopal Form of Church Government, have sufficient grounds; the weakness is the attempt to derive them from Scripture.

With this minute and rigid enforcement of the words of Scripture in passages where the ideas expressed in them either really or apparently agree with received opinions or institutions, there remains to be contrasted the neglect, or in some instances the misinterpretation of other words which are not equally in harmony with the spirit of the age. In many of our Lord's discourses He speaks of the 'blessedness of poverty'; of the hardness which they that have riches will experience 'in attaining eternal life'. 'It is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye,' and 'Son, thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things', and again 'One thing thou lackest, go sell all that thou hast'. Precepts like these do not appeal to our own experience of life; they are unlike anything that we see around us at the present day, even among good men; to some among us they will recall the remarkable saying of Lessing,—'that the Christian religion had been tried for eighteen centuries; the religion of Christ

remained to be tried.' To take them literally would be injurious to ourselves and to society (at least, so we think). Religious sects or orders who have seized this aspect of Christianity have come to no good, and have often ended in extravagance. It will not do to go into the world saying, 'Woe unto you, ye rich men,' or on entering a noble mansion to repeat the denunciations of the prophet about 'cedar and vermilion', or on being shown the prospect of a magnificent estate to cry out, 'Woe unto them that lay field to field that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth.' Times have altered, we say, since these denunciations were uttered; what appeared to the Prophet or Apostle a violation of the appointment of Providence has now become a part of it. It will not do to make a great supper, and mingle at the same board the two ends of society, as modern phraseology calls them, fetching in 'the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind,' to fill the vacant places of noble guests. That would be eccentric in modern times, and even hurtful. Neither is it suitable for us to wash one another's feet, or to perform any other menial office, because our Lord set us the example. The customs of society do not admit it; no good would be done by it, and singularity is of itself an evil. Well, then, are the precepts of Christ not to be obeyed? Perhaps in their fullest sense they cannot be obeyed. But at any rate they are not to be explained away; the standard of Christ is not to be lowered to ordinary Christian life, because ordinary Christian life cannot rise, even in good men, to the standard of Christ. And there may be 'standing among us' some one in ten thousand 'whom we know not', in whom there is such a divine union of charity and prudence that he is most blest in the entire fulfilment of the

precept—'Go sell all that thou hast,'—which to obey literally in other cases would be evil, and not good. Many there have been, doubtless (not one or two only), who have given all that they had on earth to their family or friends—the poor servant 'casting her two mites into the treasury', denying herself the ordinary comforts of life for the sake of an erring parent or brother; that is not probably an uncommon case, and as near an approach as in this life we make to heaven. And there may be some one or two rare natures in the world in whom there is such a divine courtesy, such a gentleness and dignity of soul, that differences of rank seem to vanish before them, and they look upon the face of others, even of their own servants and dependents, only as they are in the sight of God and will be in His kingdom. And there may be some tender and delicate woman among us, who feels that she has a divine vocation to fulfil the most repulsive offices towards the dying inmates of a hospital, or the soldier perishing in a foreign land. Whether such examples of self-sacrifice are good or evil, must depend, not altogether on social or economical principles, but on the spirit of those who offer them, and the power which they have in themselves of 'making all things kin'. And even if the ideal itself were not carried out by us in practice, it has nevertheless what may be termed a truth of feeling. 'Let them that have riches be as though they had them not.' 'Let the rich man wear the load lightly; he will one day fold them up as a vesture.' Let not the refinement of society make us forget that it is not the refined only who are received into the kingdom of God; nor the daintiness of life hide from us the bodily evils of which the rich man and Lazarus are alike heirs. Thoughts such as these

have the power to reunite us to our fellow creatures from whom the accidents of birth, position, wealth, have separated us; they soften our hearts towards them, when divided not only by vice and ignorance, but what is even a greater barrier, difference of manners and associations. For if there be anything in our own fortune superior to that of others, instead of idolizing or cherishing it in the blood, the Gospel would have us cast it from us; and if there be anything mean or despised in those with whom we have to do, the Gospel would have us regard such as friends and brethren, yea, even as having the person of Christ.

Another instance of apparent, if not real neglect of the precepts of Scripture, is furnished by the commandment against swearing. No precept about divorce is so plain, so universal, so exclusive as this; 'Swear not at all.' Yet we all know how the custom of Christian countries has modified this 'counsel of perfection' which was uttered by the Saviour. This is the more remarkable because in this case the precept is not, as in the former, practically impossible of fulfilment or even difficult. And yet in this instance again, the body who have endeavoured to follow more nearly the letter of our Lord's commandment, seem to have gone against the common sense of the Christian world. Or to add one more example: Who, that hears of the Sabbatarianism, as it is called, of some Protestant countries, would imagine that the Author of our religion had cautioned His disciples, not against the violation of the Sabbath, but only against its formal and Pharisaical observance; or that the chiefest of the Apostles had warned the Colossians to 'Let no man judge them in respect of the new moon, or of the sabbath-days' (ii. 16).

The neglect of another class of passages is even more surprising, the precepts contained in them being quite practicable and in harmony with the existing state of the world. In this instance it seems as if religious teachers had failed to gather those principles of which they stood most in need. 'Think ye that those eighteen upon whom the tower of Siloam fell?' is the characteristic lesson of the Gospel on the occasion of any sudden visitation. Yet it is another reading of such calamities that is commonly insisted upon. The observation is seldom made respecting the parable of the good Samaritan, that the true neighbour is also a person of a different religion. The words, 'Forbid him not: for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me,' are often said to have no application to sectarian differences in the present day, when the Church is established and miracles have ceased. The conduct of our Lord to the woman taken in adultery, though not intended for our imitation always, yet affords a painful contrast to the excessive severity with which even a Christian society punishes the errors of women. The boldness with which St. Paul applies the principle of individual judgement, 'Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind,' as exhibited also in the words quoted above, 'Let no man judge you in respect of the new moon, or of the sabbath-days,' is far greater than would be allowed in the present age. Lastly, that the tenet of the damnation of the heathen should ever have prevailed in the Christian world, or that the damnation of Catholics should have been a received opinion among Protestants, implies a strange forgetfulness of such passages as Rom. ii. 1–16. 'Who rewardeth every man according to his work,' and 'When the Gentiles, which

know not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law', &c. What a difference between the simple statement which the Apostle makes of the justice of God and the 'uncovenanted mercies' or 'invincible ignorance' of theologians half reluctant to give up, yet afraid to maintain the advantage of denying salvation to those who are '*extra palum Ecclesiae*'!

The same habit of silence or misinterpretation extends to words or statements of Scripture in which doctrines are thought to be interested. When maintaining the Athanasian doctrine of the Trinity, we do not readily recall the verse, 'of that hour knoweth no man, no not the Angels of God, *neither the Son*, but the Father' (Mark xiii. 32). The temper or feeling which led St. Ambrose to doubt the genuineness of the words marked in italics, leads Christians in our own day to pass them over. We are scarcely just to the Millenarians or to those who maintain the continuance of miracles or spiritual gifts in the Christian Church, in not admitting the degree of support which is afforded to their views by many passages of Scripture. The same remark applies to the Predestinarian controversy; the Calvinist is often hardly dealt with, in being deprived of his real standing ground in the third and ninth chapters of the Epistle to the Romans. And the Protestant who thinks himself bound to prove from Scripture the very details of doctrine or discipline which are maintained in his Church, is often obliged to have recourse to harsh methods, and sometimes to deny appearances which seem to favour some particular tenet of Roman Catholicism (Matt. xvi. 18, 19; xviii. 18: 1 Cor. iii. 15). The Roman Catholic, on the other hand, scarcely observes that nearly all the distinctive articles of his creed are wanting in the New Testament; the Cal-

vinist in fact ignores almost the whole of the sacred volume for the sake of a few verses. The truth is, that in seeking to prove our own opinions out of Scripture, we are constantly falling into the common fallacy of opening our eyes to one class of facts and closing them to another. The favourite verses shine like stars, while the rest of the page is thrown into the shade.

Nor indeed is it easy to say what is the meaning of 'proving a doctrine from Scripture'. For when we demand logical equivalents and similarity of circumstances, when we balance adverse statements, St. James and St. Paul, the New Testament with the Old, it will be hard to demonstrate from Scripture any complex system either of doctrine or practice. The Bible is not a book of statutes in which words have been chosen to cover the multitude of cases, but in the greater portion of it, especially the Gospels and Epistles, 'like a man talking to his friend.' Nay, more, it is a book written in the East, which is in some degree liable to be misunderstood, because it speaks the language and has the feeling of Eastern lands. Nor can we readily determine in explaining the words of our Lord or of St. Paul, how much (even of some of the passages just quoted) is to be attributed to Oriental modes of speech. Expressions which would be regarded as rhetorical exaggerations in the Western world are the natural vehicles of thought to an Eastern people. How great then must be the confusion where an attempt is made to draw out these Oriental modes with the severity of a philosophical or legal argument! Is it not such a use of the words of Christ which He Himself rebukes when He says? 'It is the spirit that quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing' (John vi. 52, 63).

There is a further way in which the language of

creeds and liturgies as well as the ordinary theological use of terms exercises a disturbing influence on the interpretation of Scripture. Words which occur in Scripture are singled out and incorporated in systems, like stones taken out of an old building and put into a new one. They acquire a technical meaning more or less divergent from the original one. It is obvious that their use in Scripture, and not their later and technical sense, must furnish the rule of interpretation. We should not have recourse to the meaning of a word in Polybius, for the explanation of its use in Plato, or to the turn of a sentence in Lycophron, to illustrate a construction of Aeschylus. It is the same kind of anachronism which would interpret Scripture by the scholastic or theological use of the language of Scripture. It is remarkable that this use is indeed partial, that is to say it affects one class of words and not another. Love and truth, for example, have never been theological terms; grace and faith, on the other hand, always retain an association with the Pelagian or Lutheran controversies. Justification and inspiration are derived from verbs which occur in Scripture, and the later substantive has clearly affected the meaning of the original verb or verbal in the places where they occur. The remark might be further illustrated by the use of Scriptural language respecting the Sacraments, which has also had a reflex influence on its interpretation in many passages of Scripture, especially in the Gospel of St. John (John iii. 5; vi. 56, &c). Minds which are familiar with the mystical doctrine of the Sacraments seem to see a reference to them in almost every place in the Old Testament as well as in the New, in which the words 'water', or 'bread and wine' may happen to occur.

Other questions meet us on the threshold, of a different kind, which also affect the interpretation

of Scripture, and therefore demand an answer. Is it admitted that the Scripture has one and only one true meaning? Or are we to follow the fathers into mystical and allegorical explanations? or with the majority of modern interpreters to confine ourselves to the double senses of prophecy, and the symbolism of the Gospel in the law? In either case, we assume what can never be proved, and an instrument is introduced of such subtlety and pliability as to make the Scriptures mean anything—'*Gallus in campanili*,' as the Waldenses described it; 'the weathercock on the church tower,' which is turned hither and thither by every wind of doctrine. That the present age has grown out of the mystical methods of the early fathers is a part of its intellectual state. No one will now seek to find hidden meanings in the scarlet thread of Rahab, or the number of Abraham's followers, or in the little circumstance mentioned after the resurrection of the Saviour that St. Peter was the first to enter the sepulchre. To most educated persons in the nineteenth century, these applications of Scripture appear foolish. Yet it is rather the excess of the method which provokes a smile than the method itself. For many remains of the mystical interpretation exist among ourselves; it is not the early fathers only who have read the Bible crosswise, or deciphered it as a book of symbols. And the uncertainty is the same in any part of Scripture if there is a departure from the plain and obvious meaning. If, for example, we alternate the verses in which our Lord speaks of the last things between the day of judgement and the destruction of Jerusalem; or, in the elder prophecies, which are the counterparts of these, make a corresponding division between the temporal and the spiritual Israel; or again if we attribute to the details of the Mosaical ritual a

reference to the New Testament; or, once more, supposing the passage of the Red Sea to be regarded not merely as a figure of baptism, but as a pre-ordained type, the principle is conceded; there is no good reason why the scarlet thread of Rahab should not receive the explanation given to it by Clement. A little more or a little less of the method does not make the difference between certainty and uncertainty in the interpretation of Scripture. In whatever degree it is practised it is equally incapable of being reduced to any rule; it is the interpreter's fancy, and is likely to be not less but more dangerous and extravagant when it adds the charm of authority from its use in past ages.

The question which has been suggested runs up into a more general one, 'the relation between the Old and New Testaments.' For the Old Testament will receive a different meaning accordingly as it is explained from itself or from the New. In the first case a careful and conscientious study of each one for itself is all that is required; in the second case the types and ceremonies of the law, perhaps the very facts and persons of the history, will be assumed to be predestined or made after a pattern corresponding to the things that were to be in the latter days. And this question of itself stirs another question respecting the interpretation of the Old Testament in the New. Is such interpretation to be regarded as the meaning of the original text, or an accommodation of it to the thoughts of other times?

Our object is not to attempt here the determination of these questions, but to point out that they must be determined before any real progress can be made or any agreement arrived at in the interpretation of Scripture. With one more example of another kind we may close this part of the subject.

The origin of the three first Gospels is an inquiry which has not been much considered by English theologians since the days of Bishop Marsh. The difficulty of the question has been sometimes misunderstood; the point being how there can be so much agreement in words, and so much disagreement both in words and facts; the double phenomenon is the real perplexity—how in short there can be all degrees of similarity and dissimilarity, the kind and degree of similarity being such as to make it necessary to suppose that large portions are copied from each other or from common documents; the dissimilarities being of a kind which seem to render impossible any knowledge in the authors of one another's writings. The most probable solution of this difficulty is, that the tradition on which the three first Gospels are based was at first preserved orally, and slowly put together and written in the three forms which it assumed at a very early period, those forms being in some places, perhaps, modified by translation. It is not necessary to develop this hypothesis farther. The point to be noticed is, that whether this or some other theory be the true account (and some such account is demonstrably necessary), the assumption of such a theory, or rather the observation of the facts on which it rests, cannot but exercise an influence on interpretation. We can no longer speak of three independent witnesses of the Gospel narrative. Hence there follow some other consequences. (1) There is no longer the same necessity as heretofore to reconcile inconsistent narratives; the harmony of the Gospels only means the parallelism of similar words. (2) There is no longer any need to enforce everywhere the connexion of successive verses, for the same words will be found to occur in different connexions in the different Gospels.

(3) Nor can the designs attributed to their authors be regarded as the free handling of the same subject on different plans; the difference consisting chiefly in the occurrence or absence of local or verbal explanations, or the addition or omission of certain passages. Lastly, it is evident that no weight can be given to traditional statements of facts about the authorship, as, for example, that respecting St. Mark being the interpreter of St. Peter, because the Fathers who have handed down these statements were ignorant or unobservant of the great fact, which is proved by internal evidence, that they are for the most part of common origin.

Until these and the like questions are determined by interpreters, it is not possible that there should be agreement in the interpretation of Scripture. The Protestant and Catholic, the Unitarian and Trinitarian will continue to fight their battle on the ground of the New Testament. The Preterists and Futurists, those who maintain that the roll of prophecies is completed in past history, or in the apostolical age; those who look forward to a long series of events which are yet to come [ἐς ἀφανὲς τὸν μῦθον ἀνενείκας οὐκ ἔχει ἔλεγχον], may alike claim the authority of the Book of Daniel, or the Revelation. Apparent coincidences will always be discovered by those who want to find them. Where there is no critical interpretation of Scripture, there will be a mystical or rhetorical one. If words have more than one meaning, they may have any meaning. Instead of being a rule of life or faith, Scripture becomes the expression of the ever-changing aspect of religious opinions. The unchangeable word of God, in the name of which we repose, is changed by each age and each generation in accordance with its passing fancy. The book in which we believe all

religious truth to be contained, is the most uncertain of all books, because interpreted by arbitrary and uncertain methods.

§ 3.

It is probable that some of the preceding statements may be censured as a wanton exposure of the difficulties of Scripture. It will be said that such inquiries are for the few, while the printed page lies open to the many, and that the obtrusion of them may offend some weaker brother, some half-educated or prejudiced soul, 'for whom,' nevertheless, in the touching language of St. Paul, 'Christ died.' A confusion of the heart and head may lead sensitive minds into a desertion of the principles of the Christian life, which are their own witness, because they are in doubt about facts which are really external to them. Great evil to character may sometimes ensue from such causes. 'No man can serve two' opinions without a sensible harm to his nature. The consciousness of this responsibility should be always present to writers on theology. But the responsibility is really twofold; for there is a duty to speak the truth as well as a duty to withhold it. The voice of a majority of the clergy throughout the world, the half sceptical, half conservative instincts of many laymen, perhaps, also, individual interest, are in favour of the latter course; while a higher expediency pleads that 'honesty is the best policy', and that truth alone 'makes free'. To this it may be replied, that truth is not truth to those who are unable to use it; no reasonable man would attempt to lay before the illiterate such a question as that concerning the origin of the Gospels. And yet it may be rejoined once more, the healthy tone of religion among the poor depends upon

freedom of thought and inquiry among the educated. In this conflict of reasons, individual judgement must at last decide. That there has been no rude, or improper unveiling of the difficulties of Scripture in the preceding pages, is thought to be shown by the following considerations:

First, that the difficulties referred to are very well known; they force themselves on the attention, not only of the student, but of every intelligent reader of the New Testament, whether in Greek or English. The treatment of such difficulties in theological works is no measure of public opinion respecting them. Thoughtful persons, whose minds have turned towards theology, are continually discovering that the critical observations which they make themselves have been made also by others apparently without concert. The truth is that they have been led to them by the same causes, and these again lie deep in the tendencies of education and literature in the present age. But no one is willing to break through the reticence which is observed on these subjects; hence a sort of smouldering scepticism. It is probable that the distrust is greatest at the time when the greatest efforts are made to conceal it. Doubt comes in at the window, when Inquiry is denied at the door. The thoughts of able and highly educated young men almost always stray towards the first principles of things; it is a great injury to them, and tends to raise in their minds a sort of incurable suspicion, to find that there is one book of the fruit of the knowledge of which they are forbidden freely to taste, that is, the Bible. The same spirit renders the Christian Minister almost powerless in the hands of his opponents. He can give no true answer to the mechanic or artisan who has either discovered by his

mother-wit or who retails at second-hand the objections of critics; for he is unable to look at things as they truly are.

Secondly, as the time has come when it is no longer possible to ignore the results of criticism, it is of importance that Christianity should be seen to be in harmony with them. That objections to some received views should be valid, and yet that they should be always held up as the objections of infidels, is a mischief to the Christian cause. It is a mischief that critical observations which any intelligent man can make for himself, should be ascribed to atheism or unbelief. It would be a strange and almost incredible thing that the Gospel, which at first made war only on the vices of mankind, should now be opposed to one of the highest and rarest of human virtues—the love of truth. And that in the present day the great object of Christianity should be, not to change the lives of men, but to prevent them from changing their opinion; that would be a singular inversion of the purposes for which Christ came into the world. The Christian religion is in a false position when all the tendencies of knowledge are opposed to it. Such a position cannot be long maintained, or can only end in the withdrawal of the educated classes from the influences of religion. It is a grave consideration whether we ourselves may not be in an earlier stage of the same religious dissolution, which seems to have gone further in Italy and France. The reason for thinking so is not to be sought in the external circumstances of our own or any other religious communion, but in the progress of ideas with which Christian teachers seem to be ill at ease. Time was when the Gospel was before the age; when it breathed a new life into a decaying world—when the difficulties of Christianity

were difficulties of the heart only, and the highest minds found in its truths not only the rule of their lives, but a well-spring of intellectual delight. Is it to be held a thing impossible that the Christian religion, instead of shrinking into itself, may again embrace the thoughts of men upon the earth? Or is it true that since the Reformation 'all intellect has gone the other way'? and that in Protestant countries reconciliation is as hopeless as Protestants commonly believe to be the case in Catholic?

Those who hold the possibility of such a reconcilement or restoration of belief, are anxious to disengage Christianity from all suspicion of disguise or unfairness. They wish to preserve the historical use of Scripture as the continuous witness in all ages of the higher things in the heart of man, as the inspired source of truth and the way to the better life. They are willing to take away some of the external supports, because they are not needed and do harm; also, because they interfere with the meaning. They have a faith, not that after a period of transition all things will remain just as they were before, but that they will all come round again to the use of man and to the glory of God. When interpreted like any other book, by the same rules of evidence and the same canons of criticism, the Bible will still remain unlike any other book; its beauty will be freshly seen, as of a picture which is restored after many ages to its original state; it will create a new interest and make for itself a new kind of authority by the life which is in it. It will be a spirit and not a letter; as it was in the beginning, having an influence like that of the spoken word, or the book newly found. The purer the light in the human heart, the more it will have an expression of itself in the mind of Christ; the greater the knowledge of

the development of man, the truer will be the insight gained into the 'increasing purpose' of revelation. In which also the individual soul has a practical part, finding a sympathy with its own imperfect feelings, in the broken utterance of the Psalmist or the Prophet as well as in the fulness of Christ. The harmony between Scripture and the life of man, in all its stages, may be far greater than appears at present. No one can form any notion from what we see around us, of the power which Christianity might have if it were at one with the conscience of man, and not at variance with his intellectual convictions. There, a world weary of the heat and dust of controversy—of speculations about God and man—weary too of the rapidity of its own motion, would return home and find rest.

But for the faith that the Gospel might win again the minds of intellectual men, it would be better to leave religion to itself, instead of attempting to draw them together. Other walks in literature have peace and pleasure and profit; the path of the critical Interpreter of Scripture is almost always a thorny one in England. It is not worth while for any one to enter upon it who is not supported by a sense that he has a Christian and moral object. For although an Interpreter of Scripture in modern times will hardly say with the emphasis of the Apostle, 'Woe is me, if I speak not the truth without regard to consequences,' yet he too may feel it a matter of duty not to conceal the things which he knows. He does not hide the discrepancies of Scripture, because the acknowledgement of them is the first step towards agreement among interpreters. He would restore the original meaning, because 'seven other' meanings take the place of it; the book is made the sport of opinion and the instrument

of perversion of life. He would take the excuses of the head out of the way of the heart; there is hope too that by drawing Christians together on the ground of Scripture, he may also draw them nearer to one another. He is not afraid that inquiries, which have for their object the truth, can ever be displeasing to the God of truth; or that the Word of God is in any such sense a word as to be hurt by investigations into its human origin and conception.

It may be thought another ungracious aspect of the preceding remarks, that they cast a slight upon the interpreters of Scripture in former ages. The early Fathers, the Roman Catholic mystical writers, the Swiss and German Reformers, the Nonconformist divines, have qualities for which we look in vain among ourselves; they throw an intensity of light upon the page of Scripture which we nowhere find in modern commentaries. But it is not the light of interpretation. They have a faith which seems indeed to have grown dim nowadays, but that faith is not drawn from the study of Scripture; it is the element in which their own mind moves which overflows on the meaning of the text. The words of Scripture suggest to them their own thoughts or feelings. They are preachers, or in the New Testament sense of the word, prophets rather than interpreters. There is nothing in such a view derogatory to the saints and doctors of former ages. That Aquinas or Bernard did not shake themselves free from the mystical method of the Patristic times, or the Scholastic one which was more peculiarly their own; that Luther and Calvin read the Scriptures in connexion with the ideas which were kindling in the mind of their age, and the events which were passing before their eyes, these and similar remarks are not to be construed as depreciatory of the genius or

learning of famous men of old; they relate only to their interpretation of Scripture, in which it is no slight upon them to maintain that they were not before their day.

What remains may be comprised in a few precepts, or rather is the expansion of a single one. *Interpret the Scripture like any other book.* There are many respects in which Scripture is unlike any other book; these will appear in the results of such an interpretation. The first step is to know the meaning, and this can only be done in the same careful and impartial way that we ascertain the meaning of Sophocles or of Plato. The subordinate principles which flow out of this general one will also be gathered from the observation of Scripture. No other science of Hermeneutics is possible but an inductive one, that is to say, one based on the language and thoughts and narrations of the sacred writers. And it would be well to carry the theory of interpretation no further than in the case of other works. Excessive system tends to create an impression that the meaning of Scripture is out of our reach, or is to be attained in some other way than by the exercise of manly sense and industry. Who would write a bulky treatise about the method to be pursued in interpreting Plato or Sophocles? Let us not set out on our journey so heavily equipped that there is little chance of our arriving at the end of it. The method creates itself as we go on, beginning only with a few reflections directed against plain errors. Such reflections are the rules of common sense, which we acknowledge with respect to other works written in dead languages; without pretending to novelty they may help us to 'return to nature' in the study of the sacred writings.

First, it may be laid down that Scripture has one meaning—the meaning which it had to the mind of

the Prophet or Evangelist who first uttered or wrote, to the hearers or readers who first received it. Another view may be easier or more familiar to us, seeming to receive a light and interest from the circumstances of our own age. But such accommodation of the text must be laid aside by the interpreter, whose business is to place himself as nearly as possible in the position of the sacred writer. That is no easy task—to call up the inner and outer life of the contemporaries of our Saviour; to follow the abrupt and involved utterance of St. Paul or of one of the old Prophets; to trace the meaning of words when language first became Christian. He will often have to choose the more difficult interpretation (Gal. ii. 20; Rom. iii. 15, &c.), and to refuse one more in agreement with received opinions, because the latter is less true to the style and time of the author. He may incur the charge of singularity, or confusion of ideas, or ignorance of Greek, from a misunderstanding of the peculiarity of the subject in the person who makes the charge. For if it be said that the translation of some Greek words is contrary to the usages of grammar (Gal. iv. 13), that is not in every instance to be denied; the point is, whether the usages of grammar are always observed. Or if it be objected to some interpretation of Scripture that it is difficult and perplexing, the answer is—'that may very well be—it is the fact,' arising out of differences in the modes of thought of other times, or irregularities in the use of language which no art of the interpreter can evade. One consideration should be borne in mind, that the Bible is the only book in the world written in different styles and at many different times, which is in the hands of persons of all degrees of knowledge and education. The benefit of this outweighs the evil, yet the evil should be ad-

mitted—namely, that it leads to a hasty and partial interpretation of Scripture, which often obscures the true one. A sort of conflict arises between scientific criticism and popular opinion. The indiscriminate use of Scripture has a further tendency to maintain erroneous readings or translations; some which are allowed to be such by scholars have been stereotyped in the mind of the English reader; and it becomes almost a political question how far we can venture to disturb them.

There are difficulties of another kind in many parts of Scripture, the depth and inwardness of which require a measure of the same qualities in the interpreter himself. There are notes struck in places, which like some discoveries of science have sounded before their time; and only after many days have been caught up and found a response on the earth. There are germs of truth which after thousands of years have never yet taken root in the world. There are lessons in the Prophets which, however simple, mankind have not yet learned even in theory; and which the complexity of society rather tends to hide; aspects of human life in Job and Ecclesiastes which have a truth of desolation about them which we faintly realize in ordinary circumstances. It is, perhaps, the greatest difficulty of all to enter into the meaning of the words of Christ—so gentle, so human, so divine, neither adding to them no marring their simplicity. The attempt to illustrate or draw them out in detail, even to guard against their abuse, is apt to disturb the balance of truth. The interpreter needs nothing short of 'fashioning' in himself the image of the mind of Christ. He has to be born again into a new spiritual or intellectual world, from which the thoughts of this world are shut out. It is one of the highest tasks on which

the labour of a life can be spent, to bring the words of Christ a little nearer the heart of man.

But while acknowledging this inexhaustible or infinite character of the sacred writings, it does not, therefore, follow that we are willing to admit of hidden or mysterious meanings in them: in the same way we recognize the wonders and complexity of the laws of nature to be far beyond what eye has seen or knowledge reached, yet it is not therefore to be supposed that we acknowledge the existence of some other laws, different in kind from those we know, which are incapable of philosophical analysis. In like manner we have no reason to attribute to the Prophet or Evangelist any second or hidden sense different from that which appears on the surface. All that the Prophet meant may not have been consciously present to his mind; there were depths which to himself also were but half revealed. He beheld the fortunes of Israel passing into the heavens; the temporal kingdom was fading into an eternal one. It is not to be supposed that what he saw at a distance only was clearly defined to him; or that the universal truth which was appearing and reappearing in the history of the surrounding world took a purely spiritual or abstract form in his mind. There is a sense in which we may still say with Lord Bacon, that the words of prophecy are to be interpreted as the words of one 'with whom a thousand years are as one day, and one day as a thousand years'. But that is no reason for turning days into years, or for interpreting the things 'that must shortly come to pass' in the book of Revelation, as the events of modern history, or for separating the day of judgement from the destruction of Jerusalem in the Gospels. The double meaning which is given to our Saviour's discourse respecting the last things

is not that 'form of eternity' of which Lord Bacon speaks; it resembles rather the doubling of an object when seen through glasses placed at different angles. It is true also that there are types in Scripture which were regarded as such by the Jews themselves, as for example, the scapegoat, or the paschal lamb. But there is no proof of all outward ceremonies being types when Scripture is silent;—if we assume the New Testament as a tradition running parallel with the Old, may not the Roman Catholic assume with equal reason a tradition running parallel with the New? Prophetic symbols, again, have often the same meaning in different places (e.g. the four beasts or living creatures, the colours white or red); the reason is that this meaning is derived from some natural association (as of fruitfulness, purity, or the like); or again, they are borrowed in some of the later prophecies from earlier ones; we are not, therefore, justified in supposing any hidden connexion in the prophecies where they occur. Neither is there any ground for assuming design of any other kind in Scripture any more than in Plato or Homer. Wherever there is beauty and order, there is design; but there is no proof of any artificial design, such as is often traced by the Fathers, in the relation of the several parts of a book, or of the several books to each other. That is one of those mischievous notions which enables us, under the disguise of reverence, to make Scripture mean what we please. Nothing that can be said of the greatness or sublimity, or truth, or depth, or tenderness, of many passages, is too much. But that greatness is of a simple kind; it is not increased by double senses, or systems of types, or elaborate structure, or design. If every sentence was a mystery, every word a riddle, every letter a symbol, that would not make the Scriptures more

worthy of a Divine author; it is a heathenish or Rabbinical fancy which reads them in this way. Such complexity would not place them above but below human compositions in general; for it would deprive them of the ordinary intelligibleness of human language. It is not for a Christian theologian to say that words were given to mankind to conceal their thoughts, neither was revelation given them to conceal the Divine.

The second rule is an application of the general principle; 'interpret Scripture from itself,' as in other respects like any other book written in an age and country of which little or no other literature survives, and about which we know almost nothing except what is derived from its pages. Not that all the parts of Scripture are to be regarded as an indistinguishable mass. The Old Testament is not to be identified with the New, nor the Law with the Prophets, nor the Gospels with the Epistles, nor the Epistles of St. Paul to be violently harmonized with the Epistle of St. James. Each writer, each successive age, has characteristics of its own, as strongly marked, or more strongly than those which are found in the authors or periods of classical literature. These differences are not to be lost in the idea of a Spirit from whom they proceed or by which they were overruled. And therefore, illustration of one part of Scripture by another should be confined to writings of the same age and the same authors, except where the writings of different ages or persons offer obvious similarities. It may be said further that illustration should be chiefly derived, not only from the same author, but from the same writing, or from one of the same period of his life. For example, the comparison of St. John and the 'synoptic' Gospels, or of the Gospel of St. John

with the Revelation of St. John, will tend rather to confuse than to elucidate the meaning of either; while, on the other hand, the comparison of the Prophets with one another, and with the Psalms, offers many valuable helps and lights to the interpreter. Again, the connexion between the Epistles written by the Apostle St. Paul about the same time (e.g. Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians—Colossians, Philippians, Ephesians—compared with Romans, Colossians—Ephesians, Galatians, &c.) is far closer than of Epistles which are separated by an interval of only a few years.

But supposing all this to be understood, and that by the interpretation of Scripture from itself is meant a real interpretation of like by like, it may be asked, what is it that we gain from a minute comparison of a particular author or writing? The indiscriminate use of parallel passages taken from one end of Scripture and applied to the other (except so far as earlier compositions may have afforded the material or the form of later ones) is useless and uncritical. The uneducated or imperfectly educated person who looks out the marginal references of the English Bible, imagining himself in this way to gain a clearer insight into the Divine meaning, is really following the religious associations of his own mind. Even the critical use of parallel passages is not without danger. For are we to conclude that an author meant in one place what he says in another? Shall we venture to mend a corrupt phrase on the model of some other phrase, which memory, prevailing over judgement, calls up and thrusts into the text? It is this fallacy which has filled the pages of classical writers with useless and unfounded emendations.

The meaning of the Canon '*Non nisi ex Scripturâ Scripturam potes interpretari*', is only this, 'That we

cannot understand Scripture without becoming familiar with it.' Scripture is a world by itself, from which we must exclude foreign influences, whether theological or classical. To get inside that world is an effort of thought and imagination, requiring the sense of a poet as well as a critic—demanding much more than learning a degree of original power and intensity of mind. Any one who, instead of burying himself in the pages of the commentators, would learn the sacred writings by heart, and paraphrase them in English, will probably make a nearer approach to their true meaning than he would gather from any commentary. The intelligent mind will ask its own questions, and find for the most part its own answers. The true use of interpretation is to get rid of interpretation, and leave us alone in company with the author. When the meaning of Greek words is once known, the young student has almost all the real materials which are possessed by the greatest Biblical scholar, in the book itself. For almost our whole knowledge of the history of the Jews is derived from the Old Testament and the Apocryphal books, and almost our whole knowledge of the life of Christ and of the Apostolical age is derived from the New; whatever is added to them is either conjecture, or very slight topographical or chronological illustration. For this reason the rule given above, which is applicable to all books, is applicable to the New Testament more than any other.

Yet in this consideration of the separate books of Scripture it is not to be forgotten that they have also a sort of continuity. We make a separate study of the subject, of the mode of thought, in some degree also of the language of each book. And at length the idea arises in our minds of a common literature, a pervading life, an overruling law. It

may be compared to the effect of some natural scene in which we suddenly perceive a harmony or picture, or to the imperfect appearance of design which suggests itself in looking at the surface of the globe. That is to say, there is nothing miraculous or artificial in the arrangement of the books of Scripture; it is the result, not the design, which appears in them when bound in the same volume. Or if we like so to say, there *is* design, but a natural design which is revealed to after ages. Such continuity or design is best expressed under some notion of progress or growth, not regular, however, but with broken and imperfect stages, which the want of knowledge prevents our minutely defining. The great truth of the unity of God was there from the first; slowly as the morning broke in the heavens, like some central light, it filled and afterwards dispersed the mists of human passion in which it was itself enveloped. A change passes over the Jewish religion from fear to love, from power to wisdom, from the justice of God to the mercy of God, from the nation to the individual, from this world to another; from the visitation of the sins of the fathers upon the children, to 'every soul shall bear its own iniquity'; from the fire, the earthquake, and the storm, to the still small voice. There never was a time after the deliverance from Egypt, in which the Jewish people did not bear a kind of witness against the cruelty and licentiousness of the surrounding tribes. In the decline of the monarchy, as the kingdom itself was sinking under foreign conquerors, whether springing from contact with the outer world, or from some reaction within, the undergrowth of morality gathers strength; first, in the anticipation of prophecy, secondly, like a green plant in the hollow rind of Pharisaism,—and individuals pray and commune with God each one for himself. At

length the tree of life blossoms; the faith in immortality which had hitherto slumbered in the heart of man, intimated only in doubtful words (2 Sam. xii. 23; Psalm xvii. 15), or beaming for an instant in dark places (Job xix. 25), has become the prevailing belief.

There is an interval in the Jewish annals which we often exclude from our thoughts, because it has no record in the canonical writings—extending over about four hundred years, from the last of the prophets of the Old Testament to the forerunner of Christ in the New. This interval, about which we know so little, which is regarded by many as a portion of secular rather than of sacred history, was nevertheless as fruitful in religious changes as any similar period which preceded. The establishment of the Jewish sects, and the wars of the Maccabees, probably exercised as great an influence on Judaism as the captivity itself. A third influence was that of the Alexandrian literature, which was attracting the Jewish intellect, at the same time that the Galilean zealot was tearing the nation in pieces with the doctrine that it was lawful to call 'no man master but God'. In contrast with that wild fanaticism as well as with the proud Pharisee, came One most unlike all that had been before, as the kings or rulers of mankind. In an age which was the victim of its own passions, the creature of its own circumstances, the slave of its own degenerate religion, our Saviour taught a lesson absolutely free from all the influences of a surrounding world. He made the last perfect revelation of God to man; a revelation not indeed immediately applicable to the state of society or the world, but in its truth and purity inexhaustible by the after generations of men. And of the first application of the truth which He taught as a counsel

of perfection to the actual circumstances of mankind, we have the example in the Epistles.

Such a general conception of growth or development in Scripture, beginning with the truth of the Unity of God in the earliest books and ending with the perfection of Christ, naturally springs up in our minds in the perusal of sacred writings. It is a notion of value to the interpreter, for it enables him at the same time to grasp the whole and distinguish the parts. It saves him from the necessity of maintaining that the Old Testament is one and the same everywhere; that the books of Moses contain truths or precepts, such as the duty of prayer or the faith in immortality, or the spiritual interpretation of sacrifice, which no one has ever seen there. It leaves him room enough to admit all the facts of the case. No longer is he required to defend or to explain away David's imprecations against his enemies, or his injunctions to Solomon, any more than his sin in the matter of Uriah. Nor is he hampered with a theory of accommodation. Still, the sense of 'the increasing purpose which through the ages ran' is present to him, nowhere else continuously discernible or ending in a divine perfection. Nowhere else is there found the same interpenetration of the political and religious element—a whole nation, 'though never good for much at any time,' possessed with the conviction that it was living in the face of God—in whom the Sun of righteousness shone upon the corruption of an Eastern nature—the 'fewest of all people', yet bearing the greatest part in the education of the world. Nowhere else among the teachers and benefactors of mankind is there any form like His, in whom the desire of the nation is fulfilled, and 'not of that nation only', but of all mankind, whom He restores to His Father and their Father, to His God and their God.

Such a growth or development may be regarded as a kind of progress from childhood to manhood. In the child there is an anticipation of truth; his reason is latent in the form of feeling; many words are used by him which he imperfectly understands; he is led by temporal promises, believing that to be good is to be happy always; he is pleased by marvels and has vague terrors. He is confined to a spot of earth, and lives in a sort of prison of sense, yet is bursting also with a fulness of childish life: he imagines God to be like a human father, only greater and more awful; he is easily impressed with solemn thoughts, but soon 'rises up to play' with other children. It is observable that his ideas of right and wrong are very simple, hardly extending to another life; they consist chiefly in obedience to his parents, whose word is his law. As he grows older he mixes more and more with others; first with one or two who have a great influence in the direction of his mind. At length the world opens upon him; another work of education begins; and he learns to discern more truly the meaning of things and his relation to men in general. You may complete the image, by supposing that there was a time in his early days when he was a helpless outcast 'in the land of Egypt and the house of bondage'. And as he arrives at manhood he reflects on his former years, the progress of his education, the hardships of his infancy, the home of his youth (the thought of which is ineffaceable in after life), and he now understands that all this was but a preparation for another state of being, in which he is to play a part for himself. And once more in age you may imagine him like the patriarch looking back on the entire past, which he reads anew, perceiving that the events of life had a purpose or

result which was not seen at the time; they seem to him bound 'each to each by natural piety'.

'Which things are an allegory,' the particulars of which any one may interpret for himself. For the child born after the flesh is the symbol of the child born after the Spirit. 'The law was a schoolmaster to bring men to Christ,' and now 'we are under a schoolmaster' no longer. The anticipation of truth which came from without to the childhood or youth of the human race is witnessed to within; the revelation of God is not lost but renewed in the heart and understanding of the man. Experience has taught us the application of the lesson in a wider sphere. And many influences have combined to form the 'after life' of the world. When at the close (shall we say) of a great period in the history of man, we cast our eyes back on the course of events, from the 'angel of his presence in the wilderness' to the multitude of peoples, nations, languages, who are being drawn together by His Providence—from the simplicity of the pastoral state in the dawn of the world's day, to all the elements of civilization and knowledge which are beginning to meet and mingle in a common life, we also understand that we are no longer in our early home, to which, nevertheless, we fondly look; and that the end is yet unseen, and the purposes of God towards the human race only half revealed. And to turn once more to the Interpreter of Scripture, he too feels that the continuous growth of revelation which he traces in the Old and New Testament, is a part of a larger whole extending over the earth and reaching to another world.

§ 4.

Scripture has an inner life or soul; it has also an outward body or form. That form is language,

which imperfectly expresses our common notions, much more those higher truths which religion teaches. At the time when our Saviour came into the world the Greek language was itself in a state of degeneracy and decay. It had lost its poetic force, and was ceasing to have the sway over the mind which classical Greek once held. That is a more important revolution in the mental history of mankind than we easily conceive in modern times, when all languages sit loosely on thought, and the peculiarities or idiosyncrasies of one are corrected by our knowledge of another. It may be numbered among the causes which favoured the growth of Christianity. That degeneracy was a preparation for the Gospel—the decaying soil in which the new elements of life were to come forth—the beginning of another state of man, in which language and mythology and philosophy were no longer to exert the same constraining power as in the ancient world. The civilized portion of mankind were becoming of one speech, the diffusion of which along the shores of the Mediterranean sea made a way for the entrance of Christianity into the human understanding, just as the Roman empire prepared the framework of its outward history. The first of all languages, 'for glory and for beauty,' had become the 'common dialect' of the Macedonian kingdoms; it had been moulded in the schools of Alexandria to the ideas of the East and the religious wants of Jews. Neither was it any violence to its nature to be made the vehicle of the new truths which were springing up in the heart of man. The definiteness and absence of reflectiveness in the earlier forms of human speech, would have imposed a sort of limit on the freedom and spirituality of the Gospel; even the Greek of Plato would have 'coldly furnished forth' the words

of 'eternal life'. A religion which was to be universal required the divisions of languages, as of nations, to be in some degree broken down. ['Poena linguarum dispersit homines, donum linguarum in unum collegit.'] But this community or freedom of language was accompanied by corresponding defects; it had lost its logical precision; it was less coherent, and more under the influence of association. It might be compared to a garment which allowed and yet impeded the exercise of the mind by being too large and loose for it.

From the inner life of Scripture it is time to pass on to the consideration of this outward form, including that other framework of modes of thought and figures of speech which is between the two. A knowledge of the original language is a necessary qualification of the Interpreter of Scripture. It takes away at least one chance of error in the explanation of a passage; it removes one of the films which have gathered over the page; it brings the meaning home in a more intimate and subtle way than a translation could do. To this, however, another qualification should be added, which is, the logical power to perceive the meaning of words in reference to their context. And there is a worse fault than ignorance of Greek in the interpretation of the New Testament, that is, ignorance of any language. The Greek fathers, for example, are far from being the best verbal commentators, because their knowledge of Greek often leads them away from the drift of the passage. The minuteness of the study in our own day has also a tendency to introduce into the text associations which are not really found there. There is a danger of making words mean too much; refinements of signification are drawn out of them, perhaps contained in their etymology, which are lost in

common use and parlance. There is the error of interpreting every particle, as though it were a link in the argument, instead of being, as is often the case, an excrescence of style. The verbal critic magnifies his art, which is really great in Aeschylus or Pindar, but not of equal importance in the interpretation of the simpler language of the New Testament. His love of scholarship will sometimes lead him to impress a false system on words and constructions. A great critic[1] who has commented on the three first chapters of the Epistle to the Galatians, has certainly afforded a proof that it is possible to read the New Testament under a distorting influence from classical Greek. The tendency gains support from the undefined feeling that Scripture does not come behind in excellence of language any more than of thought. And if not, as in former days, the classic purity of the Greek of the New Testament, yet its certainty and accuracy, the assumption of which, as any other assumption, is only the parent of inaccuracy, is still maintained.

The study of the language of the New Testament has suffered in another way by following too much in the track of classical scholarship. All dead languages which have passed into the hands of grammarians, have given rise to questions which have either no result or in which the certainty, or if certain, the importance of the result, is out of proportion to the labour spent in attaining it. The field is exhausted by great critics, and then subdivided among lesser ones. The subject, unlike that of physical science, has a limit, and unless new ground is broken up, as for example in mythology, or comparative philology, is apt to grow barren. Though it is not true to say that 'we know as much about

[1] [G.] Hermann.

the Greeks and Romans as we ever shall', it is certain that we run a danger from a deficiency of material, of wasting time in questions which do not add anything to real knowledge, or in conjectures which must always remain uncertain, and may in turn give way to other conjectures in the next generation. Little points may be of great importance when rightly determined, because the observation of them tends to quicken the instinct of language; but conjectures about little things or rules respecting them which were not in the mind of Greek authors themselves, are not of equal value. There is the scholasticism of philology, not only in the Alexandrian, but in our own times; as in the middle ages, there was the scholasticism of philosophy. Questions of mere orthography, about which there cannot be said to have been a right or wrong, have been pursued almost with a Rabbinical minuteness. The story of the scholar who regretted 'that he had not concentrated his life on the dative case', is hardly a caricature of the spirit of such inquiries. The form of notes to the classics often seems to arise out of a necessity for observing a certain proportion between the commentary and the text. And the same tendency is noticeable in many of the critical and philological observations which are made on the New Testament. The field of Biblical criticism is narrower, and its materials more fragmentary; so too the minuteness and uncertainty of the questions raised has been greater. For example, the discussions respecting the chronology of St. Paul's life and his second imprisonment: or about the identity of James, the brother of the Lord, or in another department, respecting the use of the Greek article, have gone far beyond the line of utility.

There seem to be reasons for doubting whether

any considerable light can be thrown on the New Testament from inquiry into the language. Such inquiries are popular, because they are safe; but their popularity is not the measure of their use. It has not been sufficiently considered that the difficulties of the New Testament are for the most part common to the Greek and the English. The noblest translation in the world has a few great errors, more than half of them in the text; but 'we do it violence' to haggle over the words. Minute corrections of tenses or particles are no good; they spoil the English without being nearer the Greek. Apparent mistranslations are often due to a better knowledge of English rather than a worse knowledge of Greek. It is true that the signification of a few uncommon expressions, e. g. ἐξουσία, ἐπιβαλών, συναπαγόμενοι, κ.τ.λ., is yet uncertain. But no result of consequence would follow from the attainment of absolute certainty respecting the meaning of any of these. A more promising field opens to the interpreter in the examination of theological terms, such as faith (πίστις), grace (χάρις), righteousness (δικαιοσύνη), sanctification (ἁγιασμός), the law (νόμος), the spirit (πνεῦμα), the comforter (παράκλητος), &c., provided always that the use of such terms in the New Testament is clearly separated (1) from their derivation or previous use in Classical or Alexandrian Greek, (2) from their after use in the Fathers and in systems of theology. To which may be added another select class of words descriptive of the offices or customs of the Apostolic Church, such as Apostle (ἀπόστολος), Bishop (ἐπίσκοπος), Elder (πρεσβύτερος), Deacon and Deaconess (ὁ καὶ ἡ διάκονος), love-feast (ἀγάπαι), the Lord's day (ἡ κυριακὴ ἡμέρα), &c. It is a lexilogus of these and similar terms, rather than a lexicon of the entire Greek

Testament that is required. Interesting subjects of real inquiry are also the comparison of the Greek of the New Testament with modern Greek on the one hand, and the Greek of the LXX on the other. It is not likely, however, that they will afford much more help than they have already done in the elucidation of the Greek of the New Testament.

It is for others to investigate the language of the Old Testament, to which the preceding remarks are only in part applicable. It may be observed in passing of this, as of any other old language, that not the later form of the language, but the cognate dialects, must ever be the chief source of its illustration. For in every ancient language, antecedent or contemporary forms, not the subsequent ones, afford the real insight into its nature and structure. It must also be admitted, that very great and real obscurities exist in the English translation of the Old Testament, which even a superficial acquaintance with the original has a tendency to remove. Leaving, however, to others the consideration of the Semitic languages, which raise questions of a different kind from the Hellenistic Greek, we will offer a few remarks on the latter. Much has been said of the increasing accuracy of our knowledge of the language of the New Testament: the old Hebraistic method of explaining difficulties of language or construction has retired within very narrow limits; it might probably with advantage be confined to still narrower ones—[if it have any place at all except in the Apocalypse or the Gospel of St. Matthew]. There is, perhaps, some confusion between accuracy of our knowledge of language, and the accuracy of language itself; which is also strongly maintained. It is observed that the usages of barbarous as well as civilized nations conform perfectly to grammatical

rules; that the uneducated in all countries have certain laws of speech as much as Shakespeare or Bacon; the usages of Lucian, it may be said, are as regular as those of Plato, even when they are different. The decay of language seems rather to witness to the permanence than to the changeableness of its structure; it is the flesh, not the bones, that begins to drop off. But such general remarks, although just, afford but little help in determining the character of the Greek of the New Testament, which has of course a certain system, failing in which it would cease to be a language, Some further illustration is needed of the change which has passed upon it. All languages do not decay in the same manner; and the influence of decay in the same language may be different in different countries; when used in writing and in speaking —when applied to the matters of ordinary life and to the higher truths of philosophy or religion. And the degeneracy of language itself is not a mere principle of dissolution, but creative also; while dead and rigid in some of its uses, it is elastic and expansive in others. The decay of an ancient language is the beginning of the construction of a modern one. The loss of some usages gives a greater precision or freedom to others. The logical element, as for example in the Mediaeval Latin, will probably be strongest when the poetical has vanished. A great movement, like the Reformation in Germany, passing over a nation, may give a new birth also to its language.

These remarks may be applied to the Greek of the New Testament, which although classed vaguely under the 'common dialect', has, nevertheless, many features which are altogether peculiar to itself, and such as are found in no other remains of ancient

literature. (1) It is more unequal in style even in the same books, that is to say, more original and plastic in one part, more rigid and unpliable in another. There is a want of the continuous power to frame a paragraph or to arrange clauses in subordination to each other, even to the extent in which it was possessed by a Greek scholiast or rhetorician. On the other hand there is a fulness of life, 'a new birth,' in the use of abstract terms, which is not found elsewhere after the golden age of Greek philosophy. Almost the only passage in the New Testament which reads like a Greek period of the time, is the first paragraph of the Gospel according to St. Luke, and the corresponding words of the Acts. But the power and meaning of the characteristic words of the New Testament is in remarkable contrast with the vapid and general use of the same words in Philo about the same time. There is also a sort of lyrical passion in some passages (1 Cor. xiii; 2 Cor. vi. 6–10; xi. 21–33) which is a new thing in the literature of the world; to which, at any rate, no Greek author of a later age furnishes any parallel. (2) Though written, the Greek of the New Testament partakes of the character of a spoken language; it is more lively and simple, and less structural than ordinary writing—a peculiarity of style which further agrees with the circumstance that the Epistles of St. Paul were not written with his own hand, but probably dictated to an amanuensis, and that the Gospels also probably originate in an oral narrative. (3) The ground colours of the language may be said to be two; first, the LXX; which is modified, secondly, by the spoken Greek of eastern countries, and by the differences which might be expected to arise between a translation and an original; many Hebraisms

would occur in the Greek of a translator, which would never have come to his pen but for the influence of the work which he was translating. (4) To which may be added a few Latin and Chaldee words, and a few Rabbinical formulae. The influence of Hebrew or Chaldee in the New Testament is for the most part at a distance, in the background, acting not directly, but mediately, through the LXX. It has much to do with the clausular structure and general form, but hardly anything with the grammatical usage. Philo, too, did not know Hebrew, or at least the Hebrew Scriptures, yet there is also a 'mediate' influence of Hebrew traceable in his writings. (5) There is an element of constraint in the style of the New Testament, arising from the circumstance of its authors writing in a language which was not their own. This constraint shows itself in the repetition of words and phrases; in the verbal oppositions and anacolutha of St. Paul; in the short sentences of St. John. This is further increased by the fact that the writers of the New Testament were 'unlearned men', who had not the same power of writing as of speech. Moreover, as has been often remarked, the difficulty of composition increases in proportion to the greatness of the subject: e. g., the narrative of Thucydides is easy and intelligible, while his reflections and speeches are full of confusion; the effort to concentrate seems to interfere with the consecutiveness and fluency of ideas. Something of this kind is discernible in those passages of the Epistles in which the Apostle St. Paul is seeking to set forth the opposite sides of God's dealing with man, e. g., Rom. iii. 1-9; ix, x; or in which the sequence of the thought is interrupted by the conflict of emotions, 1 Cor. ix. 20; Gal. iv. 11-20. (6) The power of the Gospel over

language must be recognized, showing itself, first of all, in the original and consequently variable signification of words (πίστις, χάρις, σωτηρία), which is also more comprehensive and human than the heretical usage of many of the same terms, e.g., γνῶσις (knowledge), σοφία (wisdom), κτίσις (creature, creation); secondly, in a peculiar use of some constructions, such as δικαιοσύνη Θεοῦ (righteousness of God), πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (faith of Jesus Christ), ἐν Χριστῷ (in Christ), ἐν Θεῷ (in God), ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν (for us), in which the meaning of the genitive case or of the preposition almost escapes our notice, from familiarity with the sound of it. Lastly, the degeneracy of the Greek language is traceable in the failure of syntactical power; in the insertion of prepositions to denote relations of thought, which classical Greek would have expressed by the case only; in the omission of them when classical Greek would have required them; in the incipient use of ἵνα with the subjunctive for the infinitive; in the confusion of ideas of cause and effect; in the absence of the article in the case of an increasing number of words which are passing into proper names; in the loss of the finer shades of difference in the negative particles; in the occasional confusion of the aorist and perfect; in excessive fondness for particles of reasoning or inference; in various forms of apposition, especially that of the word to the sentence; in the use, sometimes emphatic, sometimes only pleonastic, of the personal and demonstrative pronouns. These are some of the signs that the language is breaking up and losing its structure.

Our knowledge of the New Testament is derived almost exclusively from itself. Of the language, as well as of the subject, it may be truly said, that what other writers contribute is nothing in comparison

of that which is gained from observation of the text. Some inferences which may be gathered from this general fact are the following:—First, that less weight should be given to lexicons, that is, to the authority of other Greek writers, and more to the context. The use of a word in a new sense, the attribution of a neuter meaning to a verb elsewhere passive (Rom. iii. 9 προεχόμεθα), the resolution of the compound into two simple notions (Gal. iii. 1 προεγράφη), these, when the context requires it, are not to be set aside by the scholar because sanctioned by no known examples. The same remark applies to grammars as well as lexicons. We cannot be certain that διά with the accusative never has the same meaning as διά with the genitive (Gal. iv. 13; Phil. i. 15), or that the article always retains its defining power (2 Cor. i. 17; Acts xvii. 1), or that the perfect is never used in place of the aorist (1 Cor. xv. 4; Rev. v. 7, &c.); still less can we affirm that the latter end of a sentence never forgets the beginning (Rom. ii. 17–21; v. 12–18; ix. 22; xvi. 25–7; &c. &c.). Foreign influences tend to derange the strong natural perception or remembrance of the analogy of our own language. That is very likely to have occurred in the case of some of the writers of the New Testament; that there is such a derangement is a fact. There is no probability in favour of St. Paul writing in broken sentences, but there is no improbability which should lead us to assume, in such sentences, continuous grammar and thought, as appears to have been the feeling of the copyists who have corrected the anacolutha. The occurrence of them further justifies the interpreter in using some freedom with other passages in which the syntax does not absolutely break down. When 'confusion of two constructions', 'meaning to say one thing and

finishing with another,' 'saying two things in one instead of disposing them in their logical sequence,' are attributed to the Apostle; the use of these and similar expressions is defended by the fact that more numerous anacolutha occur in St. Paul's writings than in any equal portion of the New Testament, and far more than in the writings of any other Greek author of equal length.

Passing from the grammatical structure, we may briefly consider the logical character of the language of the New Testament. Two things should be here distinguished, the logical form and the logical sequence of thought. Some ages have been remarkable for the former of these two characteristics; they have dealt in opposition, contradiction, climax, pleonasm, reason within reason, and the like; mere statements taking the form of arguments—each sentence seeming to be a link in a chain. In such periods of literature, the appearance of logic is rhetorical, and is to be set down to the style. That is the case with many passages in the New Testament which are studded with logical or rhetorical formulae, especially in the Epistles of St. Paul. Nothing can be more simple or natural than the object of the writer. Yet 'forms of the schools' appear (whether learnt at the feet of Gamaliel, that reputed master of Greek learning, or not) which imply a degree of logical or rhetorical training.

The observation of this rhetorical or logical element has a bearing on the Interpretation of Scripture. For it leads us to distinguish between the superficial connexion of words and the real connexion of thoughts. Otherwise, injustice is done to the argument of the sacred writer, who may be supposed to violate logical rules, of which he is unconscious. For example, the argument of Rom. iii. 19 may be classed by the

logicians under some head of fallacy ('Ex aliquo non sequitur omnis'); the series of inferences which follow one another in Rom. i. 16–18 are for the most part different aspects or statements of the same truth. So in Rom. i. 32 the climax rather appears to be an anticlimax. But to dwell on these things interferes with the true perception of the Apostle's meaning, which is not contained in the repetitions of γὰρ by which it is hooked together; nor are we accurately to weigh the proportions expressed by his οὐ μόνον—ἀλλὰ καί, or πολλῷ μᾶλλον: neither need we suppose that where μέν is found alone, there was a reason for the omission of δέ (Rom. i. 8; iii. 2); or that the opposition of words and sentences is always the opposition of ideas (Rom. v. 7; x. 10). It is true that these and similar forms or distinctions of language admit of translation into English; and in every case the interpreter may find some point of view in which the simplest truth of feeling may be drawn out in an antithetical or argumentative form. But whether these points of view were in the Apostle's mind at the time of writing may be doubted; the real meaning, or kernel, seems to lie deeper and to be more within. When we pass from the study of each verse to survey the whole at a greater distance, the form of thought is again seen to be unimportant in comparison of the truth which is contained in it. The same remark may be extended to the opposition, not only of words, but of ideas, which is found in the Scriptures generally, and almost seems to be inherent in human language itself. The law is opposed to faith, good to evil, the spirit to the flesh, light to darkness, the world to the believer; the sheep are set 'on his right hand, but the goats on the left'. The influence of this logical opposition has been great and not always without abuse in practice. For

the opposition is one of ideas only which is not realized in fact. Experience shows us not that there are two classes of men animated by two opposing principles, but an infinite number of classes or individuals from the lowest depth of misery and sin to the highest perfection of which human nature is capable, the best not wholly good, the worst not entirely evil. But the figure or mode of representation changes these differences of degree into differences of kind. And we often think and speak and act in reference both to ourselves and others, as though the figure were altogether a reality.

Other questions arise out of the analysis of the modes of thought of Scripture. Unless we are willing to use words without inquiring into their meaning, it is necessary for us to arrange them in some relation to our own minds. The modes of thought of the Old Testament are not the same with those of the New, and those of the New are only partially the same with those in use among ourselves at the present day. The education of the human mind may be traced as clearly from the Book of Genesis to the Epistles of St. Paul, as from Homer to Plato and Aristotle. When we hear St. Paul speaking of 'body and soul and spirit', we know that such language as this would not occur in the Books of Moses or in the Prophet Isaiah. It has the colour of a later age, in which abstract terms have taken the place of expressions derived from material objects. When we proceed further to compare these or other words or expressions of St. Paul with 'the body and mind', or 'mind' and 'matter', which is a distinction, not only of philosophy, but of common language among ourselves, it is not easy at once to determine the relation between them. Familiar as is the sound of both expressions, many questions arise when we begin to compare them.

This is the metaphysical difficulty in the Interpretation of Scripture, which it is better not to ignore, because the consideration of it is necessary to the understanding of many passages, and also because it may return upon us in the form of materialism or scepticism. To some who are not aware how little words affect the nature of things it may seem to raise speculations of a very serious kind. Their doubts would, perhaps, find expression in some such exclamations as the following:—'How is religion possible when modes of thought are shifting? and words changing their meaning, and statements of doctrine, though "starched" with philosophy, are in perpetual danger of dissolution from metaphysical analysis?'

The answer seems to be, that Christian truth is not dependent on the fixedness of modes of thought. The metaphysician may analyse the ideas of the mind just as the physiologist may analyse the powers or parts of the bodily frame, yet morality and social life still go on, as in the body digestion is uninterrupted. That is not an illustration only; it represents the fact. Though we had no words for mind, matter, soul, body, and the like, Christianity would remain the same. This is obvious, whether we think of the case of the poor, who understand such distinctions very imperfectly, or of those nations of the earth, who have no precisely corresponding division of ideas. It is not of that subtle or evanescent character which is liable to be lost in shifting the use of terms. Indeed, it is an advantage at times to discard these terms with the view of getting rid of the oppositions to which they give rise. No metaphysical analysis can prevent 'our taking up the cross and following Christ', or receiving the kingdom of heaven as little children. To analyse the 'trichotomy' of St. Paul is interesting as a chapter in the history of the human mind and

necessary as a part of Biblical exegesis, but it has nothing to do with the religion of Christ. Christian duties may be enforced, and the life of Christ may be the centre of our thoughts, whether we speak of reason and faith, of soul and body, or of mind and matter, or adopt a mode of speech which dispenses with any of these divisions.

Connected with the modes of thought or representation in Scripture are the figures of speech of Scripture, about which the same question may be asked: 'What division can we make between the figure and reality?' And the answer seems to be of the same kind, that 'We cannot precisely draw the line between them'. Language, and especially the language of Scripture, does not admit of any sharp distinction. The simple expressions of one age become the allegories or figures of another; many of those in the New Testament are taken from the Old. But neither is there anything really essential in the form of these figures; nay, the literal application of many of them has been a great stumblingblock to the reception of Christianity. A recent commentator on Scripture appears willing to peril religion on the literal truth of such an expression as 'We shall be caught up to meet the Lord in the air'. Would he be equally ready to stake Christianity on the literal meaning of the words, 'Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched'?

Of what has been said this is the sum:—'That Scripture, like other books, has one meaning, which is to be gathered from itself without reference to the adaptations of Fathers or Divines; and without regard to *a priori* notions about its nature and origin. It is to be interpreted like other books, with attention to the character of its authors, and the prevailing state of civilization and knowledge, with allowance

for peculiarities of style and language, and modes of thought and figures of speech. Yet not without a sense that as we read, there grows upon us the witness of God in the world, anticipating in a rude and primitive age the truth that was to be, shining more and more unto the perfect day in the life of Christ, which again is reflected from different points of view in the teaching of His Apostles.'

§ 5.

It has been a principal aim of the preceding pages to distinguish the interpretation from the application of Scripture. Many of the errors alluded to arise out of a confusion of the two. The present is nearer to us than the past; the circumstances which surround us pre-occupy our thoughts; it is only by an effort that we reproduce the ideas, or events, or persons of other ages. And thus, quite naturally, almost by a law of the human mind, the application of Scripture takes the place of its original meaning. And the question is, not how to get rid of this natural tendency, but how we may have the true use of it. For it cannot be got rid of, or rather is one of the chief instruments of religious usefulness, in the world. 'Ideas must be given through something'; those of religion find their natural expression in the words of Scripture, in the adaptation of which to another state of life it is hardly possible that the first intention of the writers should be always preserved. Interpretation is the province of few; it requires a finer perception of language, and a higher degree of cultivation than is attained by the majority of mankind. But applications are made by all, from the philosopher reading 'God in History', to the poor woman who finds in them a response to her prayers, and the solace of her daily life. In the hour of death

we do not want critical explanations; in most cases, those to whom they would be offered are incapable of understanding them. A few words, breathing the sense of the whole Christian world, such as 'I know that my Redeemer liveth' (though the exact meaning of them may be doubtful to the Hebrew scholar); 'I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me'; touch a chord which would never be reached by the most skilful exposition of the argument of one of St. Paul's Epistles.

There is also a use of Scripture in education and literature. This literary use, though secondary to the religious one, is not unimportant. It supplies a common language to the educated and uneducated, in which the best and highest thoughts of both are expressed; it is a medium between the abstract notions of the one and the simple feelings of the other. To the poor, especially, it conveys in the form which they are most capable of receiving, the lesson of history and life. The beauty and power of speech and writing would be greatly impaired, if the Scriptures ceased to be known or used among us. The orator seems to catch from them a sort of inspiration; in the simple words of Scripture which he stamps anew, the philosopher often finds his most pregnant expressions. If modern times have been richer in the wealth of abstract thought, the contribution of earlier ages to the mind of the world has not been less, but perhaps greater, in supplying the poetry of language. There is no such treasury of instruments and materials as Scripture. The loss of Homer, or the loss of Shakespeare, would have affected the whole series of Greek or English authors who follow. But the disappearance of the Bible from the books which the world contains, would produce results far greater; we can scarcely conceive the degree in which it would

alter literature and language—the ideas of the educated and philosophical, as well as the feelings and habits of mind of the poor. If it has been said, with an allowable hyperbole, that 'Homer is Greece', with much more truth may it be said, that 'the Bible is Christendom'.

Many by whom considerations of this sort will be little understood, may, nevertheless, recognize the use made of the Old Testament in the New. The religion of Christ was first taught by an application of the words of the Psalms and the Prophets. Our Lord Himself sanctions this application. 'Can there be a better use of Scripture than that which is made by Scripture?' 'Or any more likely method of teaching the truths of Christianity than that by which they were first taught?' For it may be argued that the critical interpretation of Scripture is a device almost of yesterday; it is the vocation of the scholar or philosopher, not of the Apostle or Prophet. The new truth which was introduced into the Old Testament, rather than the old truth which was found there, was the salvation and the conversion of the world. There are many quotations from the Psalms and the Prophets in the Epistles, in which the meaning is quickened or spiritualized, but hardly any, probably none, which is based on the original sense or context. That is not so singular a phenomenon as may at first sight be imagined. It may appear strange to us that Scripture should be interpreted in Scripture, in a manner not altogether in agreement with modern criticism; but would it not be more strange that it should be interpreted otherwise than in agreement with the ideas of the age or country in which it was written? The observation that there is such an agreement, leads to two conclusions which have a bearing on our present subject. First, it is a

reason for not insisting on the applications which the New Testament makes of passages in the Old, as their original meaning. Secondly, it gives authority and precedent for the use of similar applications in our own day.

But, on the other hand, though interwoven with literature, though common to all ages of the Church, though sanctioned by our Lord and his Apostles, it is easy to see that such an employment of Scripture is liable to error and perversion. For it may not only receive a new meaning; it may be applied in a spirit alien to itself. It may become the symbol of fanaticism, the cloak of malice, the disguise of policy. Cromwell at Drogheda, quoting Scripture to his soldiers; the well-known attack on the Puritans in the State Service for the Restoration, 'Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord'; the reply of the Venetian Ambassador to the suggestion of Wolsey, that Venice should take a lead in Italy, '*which was only* the Earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof,' are examples of such uses. In former times, it was a real and not an imaginary fear, that the wars of the Lord in the Old Testament might arouse a fire in the bosom of Franks and Huns. In our own day such dangers have passed away; it is only a figure of speech when the preacher says, 'Gird on thy sword, O thou most mighty.' The warlike passions of men are not roused by quotations from Scripture, nor can states of life such as slavery or polygamy, which belong to a past age, be defended, at least in England, by the example of the Old Testament. The danger or error is of another kind; more subtle, but hardly less real. For if we are permitted to apply Scripture under the pretence of interpreting it, the language of Scripture becomes only a mode of expressing the public feeling or opinion of our own day. Any

passing phase of politics or art, or spurious philanthropy, may have a kind of Scriptural authority. The words that are used are the words of the Prophet or Evangelist, but we stand behind and adapt them to our purpose. Hence it is necessary to consider the limits and manner of a just adaptation; how much may be allowed for the sake of ornament; how far the Scripture, in all its details, may be regarded as an allegory of human life—where the true analogy begins—how far the interpretation of Scripture will serve as a corrective to its practical abuse.

Truth seems to require that we should separate mere adaptations from the original meaning of Scripture. It is not honest or reasonable to confound illustration with argument, in theology, any more than in other subjects. For example, if a preacher chooses to represent the condition of a Church or of an individual in the present day, under the figure of Elijah left alone among the idolatrous tribes of Israel, such an allusion is natural enough; but if he goes on to argue that individuals are therefore justified in remaining in what they believe to be an erroneous communion—that is a mere appearance of argument which ought not to have the slightest weight with a man of sense. Such a course may indeed be perfectly justifiable, but not on the ground that a prophet of the Lord once did so, two thousand five hundred years ago. Not in this sense were the lives of the Prophets written for our instruction. There are many important morals conveyed by them, but only so far as they themselves represent universal principles of justice and love. These universal principles they clothe with flesh and blood; they show them to us written on the hearts of men of like passions with ourselves. The prophecies, again, admit of many applications to the Christian Church or to the Christian life. There is

no harm in speaking of the Church as the Spiritual Israel, or in using the imagery of Isaiah respecting Messiah's kingdom, as the type of good things to come. But when it is gravely urged, that from such passages as 'Kings shall be thy nursing fathers', we are to collect the relations of Church and State, or from the pictorial description of Isaiah, that it is to be inferred there will be a reign of Christ on earth—that is a mere assumption of the forms of reasoning by the imagination. Nor is it a healthful or manly tone of feeling which depicts the political opposition to the Church in our own day, under imagery which is borrowed from the desolate Sion of the captivity. Scripture is apt to come too readily to the lips, when we are pouring out our own weaknesses, or enlarging on some favourite theme—perhaps idealizing in the language of prophecy the feebleness of preaching or missions in the present day, or from the want of something else to say. In many discussions on these and similar subjects, the position of the Jewish King, Church, Priest, has led to a confusion, partly caused by the use of similar words in modern senses among ourselves. The King or Queen of England may be called the Anointed of the Lord, but we should not therefore imply that the attributes of sovereignty are the same as those which belonged to King David. All these are figures of speech, the employment of which is too common, and has been injurious to religion, because it prevents our looking at the facts of history or life as they truly are.

This is the first step towards a more truthful use of Scripture in practice—the separation of adaptation from interpretation. No one who is engaged in preaching or in religious instruction can be required to give up Scripture language; it is the common element in which his thoughts and those of his hearers

move. But he may be asked to distinguish the words of Scripture from the truths of Scripture—the means from the end. The least expression of Scripture is weighty; it affects the minds of the hearers in a way that no other language can. Whatever responsibility attaches to idle words, attaches in still greater degree to the idle or fallacious use of Scripture terms. And there is surely a want of proper reverence for Scripture, when we confound the weakest and feeblest applications of its words with their true meaning—when we avail ourselves of their natural power to point them against some enemy—when we divert the eternal words of charity and truth into a defence of some passing opinion. For not only in the days of the Pharisees, but in our own, the letter has been taking the place of the spirit; the least matters, of the greatest, and the primary meaning has been lost in the secondary use.

Other simple cautions may also be added. The applications of Scripture should be harmonized and, as it were, interpenetrated with the spirit of the Gospel, the whole of which should be in every part; though the words may receive a new sense, the new sense ought to be in agreement with the general truth. They should be used to bring home practical precepts, not to send the imagination on a voyage of discovery; they are not the real foundation of our faith in another world, nor can they, by pleasant pictures, add to our knowledge of it. They should not confound the accidents with the essence of religion—the restrictions and burdens of the Jewish law with the freedom of the Gospel—the things which Moses allowed for the hardness of the heart, with the perfection of the teaching of Christ. They should avoid the form of arguments, or they will insensibly be used, or understood, to mean more than they really do. They

should be subjected to an overruling principle, which is the heart and conscience of the Christian teacher, who indeed 'stands behind them', not to make them the vehicles of his own opinions, but as the expressions of justice, and truth, and love.

And here the critical interpretation of Scripture comes in and exercises a corrective influence on its popular use. We have already admitted that criticism is not for the multitude; it is not what the Scripture terms the Gospel preached to the poor. Yet, indirectly passing from the few to the many, it has borne a great part in the Reformation of religion. It has cleared the eye of the mind to understand the original meaning. It was a sort of criticism which supported the struggle of the sixteenth century against the Roman Catholic Church; it is criticism that is leading Protestants to doubt whether the doctrine that the Pope is Antichrist, which has descended from the same period, is really discoverable in Scripture. Even the isolated thinker, against whom the religious world is taking up arms, has an influence on his opponents. The force of observations, which are based on reason and fact, remains when the tide of religious or party feeling is gone down. Criticism has also a healing influence in clearing away what may be termed the Sectarianism of knowledge. Without criticism it would be impossible to reconcile History and Science with Revealed Religion; they must remain for ever in a hostile and defiant attitude. Instead of being like other records, subject to the conditions of knowledge which existed in an early stage of the world, Scripture would be regarded on the one side as the work of organic Inspiration, and as a lying imposition on the other.

The real unity of Scripture, as of man, has also

a relation to our present subject. Amid all the differences of modes of thought and speech which have existed in different ages, of which much is said in our own day, there is a common element in human nature which bursts through these differences and remains unchanged, because akin to the first instincts of our being. The simple feeling of truth and right is the same to the Greek or Hindoo as to ourselves. However great may be the diversities of human character, there is a point at which these diversities end, and unity begins to appear. Now this admits of an application to the books of Scripture, as well as to the world generally. Written at many different times, in more than one language, some of them in fragments, they, too, have a common element of which the preacher may avail himself. This element is twofold, partly divine and partly human; the revelation of the truth and righteousness of God, and the cry of the human heart towards Him. Every part of Scripture tends to raise us above ourselves—to give us a deeper sense of the feebleness of man, and of the wisdom and power of God. It has a sort of kindred, as Plato would say, with religious truth everywhere in the world. It agrees also with the imperfect stages of knowledge and faith in human nature, and answers to its inarticulate cries. The universal truth easily breaks through the accidents of time and place in which it is involved. Although we cannot apply Jewish institutions to the Christian world, or venture in reliance on some text to resist the tide of civilization on which we are borne, yet it remains, nevertheless, to us, as well as to the Jews and first Christians, that 'Righteousness exalteth a nation', and that 'love is the fulfilling not of the Jewish law only, but of all law'.

In some cases, we have only to enlarge the meaning

of Scripture to apply it even to the novelties and peculiarities of our own times. The world changes, but the human heart remains the same; events and details are different, but the principle by which they are governed, or the rule by which we are to act, is not different. When, for example, our Saviour says, 'Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free,' it is not likely that these words would have conveyed to the minds of the Jews who heard Him any notion of the perplexities of doubt or inquiry. Yet we cannot suppose that our Saviour, were He to come again upon the earth, would refuse thus to extend them. The Apostle St. Paul, when describing the Gospel, which is to the Greek foolishness, speaks also of a higher wisdom which is known to those who are perfect. Neither is it unfair for us to apply this passage to that reconcilement of faith and knowledge, which may be termed Christian philosophy, as the nearest equivalent to its language in our own day. Such words, again, as 'Why seek ye the living among the dead?' admit of a great variety of adaptations to the circumstances of our own time. Many of these adaptations have a real germ in the meaning of the words. The precept, 'Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and to God the things that are God's,' may be taken generally as expressing the necessity of distinguishing the divine and human—the things that belong to faith and the things that belong to experience. It is worth remarking in the application made of these words by Lord Bacon, 'Da fidei quae fidei sunt;' that, although the terms are altered, yet the circumstance that the form of the sentence is borrowed from Scripture gives them point and weight.

The portion of Scripture which more than any

other is immediately and universally applicable to our own times is, doubtless, that which is contained in the words of Christ Himself. The reason is that they are words of the most universal import. They do not relate to the circumstances of the time, but to the common life of all mankind. You cannot extract from them a political creed; only, 'Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's,' and, 'The Scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses' seat; whatsoever, therefore, they say unto you do, but after their works do not.' They present to us a standard of truth and duty, such as no one can at once and immediately practise—such as, in its perfection, no one has fulfilled in this world. But this idealism does not interfere with their influence as a religious lesson. Ideals, even though unrealized, have effect on our daily life. The preacher of the Gospel is, or ought to be, aware that his calls to repentance, his standard of obligations, his lamentations over his own shortcomings or those of others, do not at once convert hundreds or thousands, as on the day of Pentecost. Yet it does not follow that they are thrown away, or that it would be well to substitute for them mere prudential or economical lessons, lectures on health or sanitary improvement. For they tend to raise men above themselves, providing them with Sabbaths as well as working days, giving them a taste of 'the good word of God' and of 'the powers of the world to come'. Human nature needs to be idealized; it seems as if it took a dislike to itself when presented always in its ordinary attire; it lives on in the hope of becoming better. And the image or hope of a better life—the vision of Christ crucified—which is held up to it, doubtless has an influence; not like the rushing mighty wind of the day of Pentecost; it may rather be compared to the

leaven, 'which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.'

The Parables of our Lord are a portion of the New Testament, which we may apply in the most easy and literal manner. The persons in them are the persons among whom we live and move; there are times and occasions at which the truths symbolized by them come home to the hearts of all who have ever been impressed by religion. We have been prodigal sons returning to our Father; servants to whom talents have been entrusted; labourers in the vineyard inclined to murmur at our lot, when compared with that of others, yet receiving every man his due; well-satisfied Pharisees; repentant Publicans:—we have received the seed, and the cares of the world have choked it—we hope also at times that we have found the pearl of great price after sweeping the house—we are ready like the Good Samaritan to show kindness to all mankind. Of these circumstances of life or phases of mind, which are typified by the parables, most Christians have experience. We may go on to apply many of them further to the condition of nations and Churches. Such a treasury has Christ provided us of things new and old, which refer to all time and all mankind—may we not say in His own words—'because He is the Son of Man'?

There is no language of Scripture which penetrates the individual soul, and embraces all the world in the arms of its love, in the same manner as that of Christ Himself. Yet the Epistles contain lessons which are not found in the Gospels, or, at least, not expressed with the same degree of clearness. For the Epistles are nearer to actual life—they relate to the circumstances of the first believers, to their struggles with the world without, to their tempta-

tions and divisions from within—their subject is not only the doctrine of the Christian religion, but the business of the early Church. And although their circumstances are not our circumstances—we are not afflicted or persecuted, or driven out of the world, but in possession of the blessings, and security, and property of an established religion—yet there is a Christian spirit which infuses itself into all circumstances, of which they are a pure and living source. It is impossible to gather from a few fragmentary and apparently not always consistent expressions, how the Communion was celebrated, or the Church ordered, what was the relative position of Presbyters and Deacons, or the nature of the gift of tongues, as a rule for the Church in after ages:—such inquiries have no certain answer, and, at the best, are only the subject of honest curiosity. But the words, 'Charity never faileth,' and 'Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am nothing',—these have a voice which reaches to the end of time. There are no questions of meats and drinks nowadays, yet the noble words of the Apostle remain: 'If meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.' Moderation in controversy, toleration towards opponents or erring members, is a virtue which has been thought by many to belong to the development and not to the origin of Christianity, and which is rarely found in the commencement of a religion. But lessons of toleration may be gathered from the Apostle, which have not yet been learned either by theologians or by mankind in general. The persecutions and troubles which awaited the Apostle no longer await us; we cannot, therefore, without unreality, except, perhaps,

in a very few cases, appropriate his words, 'I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.' But that other text still sounds gently in our ears: 'My strength is perfected in weakness,' and 'when I am weak, then am I strong'. We cannot apply to ourselves the language of authority in which the Apostle speaks of himself as an ambassador for Christ, without something like bad taste. But it is not altogether an imaginary hope that those of us who are ministers of Christ may attain to a real imitation of his great diligence, of his sympathy with others, and consideration for them—of his willingness to spend and be spent in his Master's service.

Such are a few instances of the manner in which the analogy of faith enables us to apply the words of Christ and His Apostles, with a strict regard to their original meaning. But the Old Testament has also its peculiar lessons which are not conveyed with equal point or force in the New. The beginnings of human history are themselves a lesson having a freshness as of the early dawn. There are forms of evil against which the Prophets and the prophetical spirit of the Law carry on a warfare, in terms almost too bold for the way of life of modern times. There, more plainly than in any other portion of Scripture, is expressed the antagonism of outward and inward, of ceremonial and moral, of mercy and sacrifice. There all the masks of hypocrisy are rudely torn asunder, in which an unthinking world allows itself to be disguised. There the relations of rich and poor in the sight of God, and their duties towards one another, are most clearly enunciated. There the religion of suffering first appears—'adversity, the blessing' of the Old Testament, as well as of the New. There the sorrows and aspirations of the

soul find their deepest expression, and also their consolation. The feeble person has an image of himself in the 'bruised reed'; the suffering servant of God passes into the 'beloved one, in whom my soul delighteth'. Even the latest and most desolate phases of the human mind are reflected in Job and Ecclesiastes; yet not without the solemn assertion that 'to fear God and keep his commandments' is the beginning and end of all things.

It is true that there are examples in the Old Testament which were not written for our instruction, and that, in some instances, precepts or commands are attributed to God Himself, which must be regarded as relative to the state of knowledge which then existed of the Divine nature, or given 'for the hardness of men's hearts'. It cannot be denied that such passages of Scripture are liable to misunderstanding; the spirit of the Old Covenanters, although no longer appealing to the action of Samuel, 'hewing Agag in pieces before the Lord in Gilgal,' is not altogether extinguished. And a community of recent origin in America found their doctrine of polygamy on the Old Testament. But the poor generally read the Bible unconsciously; they take the good, and catch the prevailing spirit, without stopping to reason whether this or that practice is sanctioned by the custom or example of Scripture. The child is only struck by the impiety of the children who mocked the prophet; he does not think of the severity of the punishment which is inflicted upon them. And the poor, in this respect, are much like children; their reflection on the morality or immorality of characters or events is suppressed by reverence for Scripture. The Christian teacher has a sort of tact by which he guides them to perceive only the spirit of the

Gospel everywhere; they read in the Psalms, of David's sin and repentance; of the never-failing goodness of God to him, and his never-failing trust in Him, not of his imprecations against his enemies. Such difficulties are greater in theory and on paper, than in the management of a school or parish. They are found to affect the half-educated, rather than either the poor, or those who are educated in a higher sense. To be above such difficulties is the happiest condition of human life and knowledge, or to be below them; to see, or think we see, how they may be reconciled with Divine power and wisdom, or not to see how they are apparently at variance with them.

§ 6.

Some application of the preceding subject may be further made to theology and life.

Let us introduce this concluding inquiry with two remarks.

First, it may be observed, that a change in some of the prevailing modes of interpretation is not so much a matter of expediency as of necessity. The original meaning of Scripture is beginning to be clearly understood. But the apprehension of the original meaning is inconsistent with the reception of a typical or conventional one. The time will come when educated men will be no more able to believe that the words, 'Out of Egypt have I called my son' (Matt. ii. 15; Hos. xi. 1), were *intended* by the prophet to refer to the return of Joseph and Mary from Egypt, than they are now able to believe the Roman Catholic explanation of Gen. iii. 15, 'Ipsa conteret caput tuum.' They will no more think that the first chapters of Genesis relate the same tale which Geo-

logy and Ethnology unfold than they now think the meaning of Joshua x. 12, 13, to be in accordance with Galileo's discovery.

From the circumstance that in former ages there has been a fourfold or a sevenfold Interpretation of Scripture, we cannot argue to the possibility of upholding any other than the original one in our own. The mystical explanations of Origen or Philo were not seen to be mystical; the reasonings of Aquinas and Calvin were not supposed to go beyond the letter of the text. They have now become the subject of apology; it is justly said that we should not judge the greatness of the Fathers or Reformers by their suitableness to our own day. But this defence of them shows that their explanations of Scripture are no longer tenable; they belong to a way of thinking and speaking which was once diffused over the world, but has now passed away. And what we give up as a general principle we shall find it impossible to maintain partially, e. g., in the types of the Mosaic Law and the double meanings of prophecy—at least, in any sense in which it is not equally applicable to all deep and suggestive writings.

The same observation may be applied to the historical criticism of Scripture. From the fact that Paley or Butler were regarded in their generation as supplying a triumphant answer to the enemies of Scripture, we cannot argue that their answer will be satisfactory to those who inquire into such subjects in our own. Criticism has far more power than it formerly had; it has spread itself over ancient, and even modern, history; it extends to the thoughts and ideas of men as well as to words and facts; it has also a great place in education. Whether the habit of mind which has been formed in classical studies will not go on to Scripture; whether Scripture can be

made an exception to other ancient writings, now that the nature of both is more understood; whether in the fuller light of history and science the views of the last century will hold out—these are questions respecting which the course of religious opinion in the past does not afford the means of truly judging.

Secondly, it has to be considered whether the intellectual forms under which Christianity has been described may not also be in a state of transition and resolution, in this respect contrasting with the never-changing truth of the Christian life (1 Cor. xiii. 8). Looking backwards at past ages, we experience a kind of amazement at the minuteness of theological distinctions, and also at their permanence. They seem to have borne a part in the education of the Christian world, in an age when language itself had also a greater influence than nowadays. It is admitted that these distinctions are not observed in the New Testament, and are for the most part of a later growth. But little is gained by setting up theology against Scripture, or Scripture against theology; the Bible against the Church, or the Church against the Bible. At different periods either has been a bulwark against some form of error: either has tended to correct the abuse of the other. A true inspiration guarded the writers of the New Testament from Gnostic or Manichean tenets; at a later stage, a sound instinct prevented the Church from dividing the humanity and Divinity of Christ. It may be said that the spirit of Christ forbids us to determine beyond what is written; and the decision of the council of Nicaea has been described by an eminent English prelate[1] as 'the greatest misfortune that ever befel the Christian world'. That is, perhaps, true; yet a different de-

[1] [Kaye, Bishop of Lincoln, d. 1853.]

cision would have been a greater misfortune. Nor does there seem any reason to suppose that the human mind could have been arrested in its theological course. It is a mistake to imagine that the dividing and splitting of words is owing to the depravity of the human heart; was it not rather an intellectual movement (the only phenomenon of progress then going on among men) which led, by a sort of necessity, some to go forward to the completion of the system, while it left others to stand aside? A veil was on the human understanding in the great controversies which absorbed the Church in earlier ages; the cloud which the combatants themselves raised intercepted the view. They did not see—they could not have imagined—that there was a world which lay beyond the range of the controversy.

And now, as the Interpretation of Scripture is receiving another character, it seems that distinctions of theology, which were in great measure based on old interpretations, are beginning to fade away. A change is observable in the manner in which doctrines are stated and defended; it is no longer held sufficient to rest them on texts of Scripture, one, two, or more, which contain, or appear to contain, similar words or ideas. They are connected more closely with our moral nature; extreme consequences are shunned; large allowances are made for the ignorance of mankind. It is held that there is truth on both sides; about many questions there is a kind of union of opposites; others are admitted to have been verbal only; all are regarded in the light which is thrown upon them by church history and religious experience. A theory has lately been put forward, apparently as a defence of the Christian faith, which denies the objective character of any of them. And there are other signs that times are changing, and we are changing too.

It would be scarcely possible at present to revive the interest which was felt less than twenty years ago [1] in the doctrine of Baptismal Regeneration; nor would the arguments by which it was supported or impugned have the meaning which they once had. The communion of the Lord's Supper is also ceasing, at least in the Church of England, to be a focus or centre of disunion—

'Our greatest love turned to our greatest hate.'

A silence is observable on some other points of doctrine around which controversies swarmed a generation ago. Persons begin to ask what was the real difference which divided the two parties. They are no longer within the magic circle, but are taking up a position external to it. They have arrived at an age of reflection, and begin to speculate on the action and reaction, the irritation and counter-irritation, of religious forces; it is a common observation that 'revivals are not permanent'; the movement is criticized even by those who are subject to its influence. In the present state of the human mind, any consideration of these subjects, whether from the highest or lowest or most moderate point of view, is unfavourable to the stability of dogmatical systems, because it rouses inquiry into the meaning of words. To the sense of this is probably to be attributed the reserve on matters of doctrine and controversy which characterizes the present day, compared with the theological activity of twenty years ago.[1]

These reflections bring us back to the question with which we began—'What effect will the critical interpretation of Scripture have on theology and on life?' Their tendency is to show that the result is

[1] [Written in 1860.]

beyond our control, and that the world is not unprepared for it. More things than at first sight appear are moving towards the same end. Religion often bids us think of ourselves, especially in later life, as, each one in his appointed place, carrying on a work which is fashioned within by unseen hands. The theologian, too, may have peace in the thought, that he is subject to the conditions of his age rather than one of its moving powers. When he hears theological inquiry censured as tending to create doubt and confusion, he knows very well that the cause of this is not to be sought in the writings of so-called rationalists or critics who are disliked partly because they unveil the age to itself; but in the opposition of reason and feeling, of the past and the present, in the conflict between the Calvinistic tendencies of an elder generation, and the influences which even in the same family naturally affect the young.

This distraction of the human mind between adverse influences and associations, is a fact which we should have to accept and make the best of, whatever consequences might seem to follow to individuals or Churches. It is not to be regarded as a merely heathen notion that 'truth is to be desired for its own sake even though no "good" result from it'. As a Christian paradox it may be said, 'What hast thou to do with "good"? follow thou Me.' But the Christian revelation does not require of us this Stoicism in most cases; it rather shows how good and truth are generally coincident. Even in this life, there are numberless links which unite moral good with intellectual truth. It is hardly too much to say that the one is but a narrower form of the other. Truth is to the world what holiness of life is to the individual—to man collectively the source of justice and peace and good.

There are many ways in which the connexion between truth and good may be traced in the interpretation of Scripture. Is it a mere chimera that the different sections of Christendom may meet on the common ground of the New Testament? Or that the individual may be urged by the vacancy and unprofitableness of old traditions to make the Gospel his own—a life of Christ in the soul, instead of a theory of Christ which is in a book or written down? Or that in missions to the heathen Scripture may become the expression of universal truths rather than of the tenets of particular men or churches? That would remove many obstacles to the reception of Christianity. Or that the study of Scripture may have a more important place in a liberal education than hitherto? Or that the 'rational service' of interpreting Scripture may dry up the crude and dreamy vapours of religious excitement? Or, that in preaching, new sources of spiritual health may flow from a more natural use of Scripture? Or that the lessons of Scripture may have a nearer way to the hearts of the poor when disengaged from theological formulas? Let us consider more at length some of these topics.

I. No one casting his eye over the map of the Christian world can desire that the present lines of demarcation should always remain, any more than he will be inclined to regard the division of Christians to which he belongs himself, as in a pre-eminent or exclusive sense the Church of Christ. Those lines of demarcation seem to be political rather than religious; they are differences of nations, or governments, or ranks of society, more than of creeds or forms of faith. The feeling which gave rise to them has, in a great measure, passed away; no intelligent man seriously inclines to believe that salvation is to be

found only in his own denomination. Examples of this 'sturdy orthodoxy', in our own generation, rather provoke a smile than arouse serious disapproval. Yet many experiments show that these differences cannot be made up by any formal concordat or scheme of union; the parties cannot be brought to terms, and if they could, would cease to take an interest in the question at issue. The friction is too great when persons are invited to meet for a discussion of differences; such a process is like opening the doors and windows to put out a slumbering flame. But that is no reason for doubting that the divisions of the Christian world are beginning to pass away. The progress of politics, acquaintance with other countries, the growth of knowledge and of material greatness, changes of opinion in the Church of England, the present position of the Roman Communion—all these phenomena show that the ecclesiastical state of the world is not destined to be perpetual. Within the envious barriers which 'divide human nature into very little pieces' (Plato, *Rep.* iii. 395), a common sentiment is springing up of religious truth; the essentials of Christianity are contrasted with the details and definitions of it; good men of all religions find that they are more nearly agreed than heretofore. Neither is it impossible that this common feeling may so prevail over the accidental circumstances of Christian communities, that their political or ecclesiastical separation may be little felt. The walls which no adversary has scaled may fall down of themselves. We may perhaps figure to ourselves the battle against error and moral evil taking the place of one of sects and parties.

In this movement, which we should see more clearly but for the divisions of the Christian world which partly conceal it, the critical interpretation of Scrip-

ture will have a great influence. The Bible will be no longer appealed to as the witness of the opinions of particular sects, or of our own age; it will cease to be the battle-field of controversies. But as its true meaning is more clearly seen, its moral power will also be greater. If the outward and inward witness, instead of parting into two, as they once did, seem rather to blend and coincide in the Christian consciousness, that is not a source of weakness, but of strength. The Book itself, which links together the beginning and end of the human race, will not have a less inestimable value because the spirit has taken the place of the letter. Its discrepancies of fact, when we become familiar with them, will seem of little consequence in comparison with the truths which it unfolds. That these truths, instead of floating down the stream of tradition, or being lost in ritual observances, have been preserved for ever in a book, is one of the many blessings which the Jewish and Christian revelations have conferred on the world —a blessing not the less real, because it is not necessary to attribute it to miraculous causes.

Again, the Scriptures are a bond of union to the whole Christian world. No one denies their authority, and could all be brought to an intelligence of their true meaning, all might come to agree in matters of religion. That may seem to be a hope deferred, yet not altogether chimerical. If it is not held to be a thing impossible that there should be agreement in the meaning of Plato or Sophocles, neither is it to be regarded as absurd that there should be a like agreement in the interpretation of Scripture. The disappearance of artificial notions and systems will pave the way to such an agreement. The recognition of the fact, that many aspects and stages of religion are found in Scripture; that different, or even opposite

parties existed in the Apostolic Church; that the first teachers of Christianity had a separate and individual mode of regarding the Gospel of Christ; that any existing communion is necessarily much more unlike the brotherhood of love in the New Testament than we are willing to suppose—Protestants in some respects, as much so as Catholics—that rival sects in our own day—Calvinists and Arminians—those who maintain and those who deny the final restoration of man—may equally find texts which seem to favour their respective tenets (Mark ix. 44–48; Romans xi. 32)—the recognition of these and similar facts will make us unwilling to impose any narrow rule of religious opinion on the ever-varying conditions of the human mind and Christian society.

II. Christian missions suggest another sphere in which a more enlightened use of Scripture might offer a great advantage to the teacher. The more he is himself penetrated with the universal spirit of Scripture, the more he will be able to resist the literal and servile habits of mind of Oriental nations. You cannot transfer English ways of belief, and almost the history of the Church of England itself, as the attempt is sometimes made—not to an uncivilized people, ready like children to receive new impressions, but to an ancient and decaying one, furrowed with the lines of thought, incapable of the principle of growth. But you may take the purer light or element of religion, of which Christianity is the expression, and make it shine on some principle in human nature which is the fallen image of it. You cannot give a people who have no history of their own, a sense of the importance of Christianity, as an historical fact: but, perhaps, that very peculiarity of their character may make them more impressible by the truths or

ideas of Christianity. Neither is it easy to make them understand the growth of Revelation in successive ages—that there are precepts of the Old Testament which are reversed in the New—or that Moses allowed many things for the hardness of men's hearts. They are in one state of the world, and the missionary who teaches them is in another, and the Book through which they are taught does not altogether coincide with either. Many difficulties thus arise which we are most likely to be successful in meeting when we look them in the face. To one inference they clearly point, which is this: that it is not the Book of Scripture which we should seek to give them, to be reverenced like the Vedas or the Koran, and consecrated in its words and letters, but the truth of the Book, the mind of Christ and His Apostles, in which all lesser details and differences should be lost and absorbed. We want to awaken in them the sense that God is their Father, and they His children; —that is of more importance than any theory about the inspiration of Scripture. But to teach in this spirit, the missionary should himself be able to separate the accidents from the essence of religion; he should be conscious that the power of the Gospel resides not in the particulars of theology, but in the Christian life.

III. It may be doubted whether Scripture has ever been sufficiently regarded as an element of liberal education. Few deem it worth while to spend in the study of it the same honest thought or pains which are bestowed on a classical author. Nor, as at present studied, can it be said always to have an elevating effect. It is not a useful lesson for the young student to apply to Scripture principles which he would hesitate to apply to other books; to make formal reconcilements of discrepancies which he would

not think of reconciling in ordinary history; to divide simple words into double meanings; to adopt the fancies or conjectures of Fathers and Commentators as real knowledge. This laxity of knowledge is apt to infect the judgement when transferred to other subjects. It is not easy to say how much of the unsettlement of mind which prevails among intellectual young men is attributable to these causes; the mixture of truth and falsehood in religious education certainly tends to impair, at the age when it is most needed, the early influence of a religious home.

Yet Scripture studied in a more liberal spirit might supply a part of education which classical literature fails to provide. 'The best book for the heart might also be made the best book for the intellect.' The noblest study of history and antiquity is contained in it; a poetry which is also the highest form of moral teaching; there, too, are lives of heroes and prophets, and especially of One whom we do not name with them, because He is above them. This history, or poetry, or biography, is distinguished from all classical or secular writings by the contemplation of man as he appears in the sight of God. That is a sense of things into which we must grow as well as reason ourselves, without which human nature is but a truncated, half-educated sort of being. But this sense or consciousness of a Divine presence in the world, which seems to be natural to the beginnings of the human race, but fades away and requires to be renewed in its after history, is not to be gathered from Greek or Roman literature, but from the Old and New Testament. And before we can make the Old and New Testament a real part of education, we must read them not by the help of custom or tradition, in the spirit of apology or controversy, but in

accordance with the ordinary laws of human knowledge.

IV. Another use of Scripture is that in sermons, which seems to be among the tritest, and yet is far from being exhausted. If we could only be natural and speak of things as they truly are, with a real interest and not merely a conventional one! The words of Scripture come readily to hand, and the repetition of them requires no effort of thought in the writer or speaker. But, neither does it produce any effect on the hearer, which will always be in proportion to the degree of feeling or consciousness in ourselves. It may be said that originality is the gift of few; no Church can expect to have, not a hundred, but ten such preachers as Robertson or Newman. But, without originality, it seems possible to make use of Scripture in sermons in a much more living way than at present. Let the preacher make it a sort of religion, and proof of his reverence for Scripture, that he never uses its words without a distinct meaning; let him avoid the form of argument from Scripture, and catch the feeling and spirit. Scripture is itself a kind of poetry, when not overlaid with rhetoric. The scene and country has a freshness which may always be renewed; there is the interest of antiquity and the interest of home or common life as well. The facts and characters of Scripture might receive a new reading by being described simply as they are. The truths of Scripture again would have greater reality if divested of the scholastic form in which theology has cast them. The universal and spiritual aspects of Scripture might be more brought forward to the exclusion of questions of the Jewish law, or controversies about the sacraments, or exaggerated statements of doctrines which seem to be at variance with morality. The life of Christ, regarded

quite naturally as of one 'who was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin', is also the life and centre of Christian teaching. There is no higher aim which the preacher can propose to himself than to awaken what may be termed the feeling of the presence of God and the mind of Christ in Scripture; not to collect evidences about dates and books, or to familiarize metaphysical distinctions; but to make the heart and conscience of his hearers bear him witness that the lessons which are contained in Scripture—lessons of justice and truth—lessons of mercy and peace—of the need of man and the goodness of God to him, are indeed not human but divine.

V. It is time to make an end of this long disquisition—let the end be a few more words of application to the circumstances of a particular class in the present age. If any one who is about to become a clergyman feels, or thinks that he feels, that some of the preceding statements cast a shade of trouble or suspicion on his future walk of life; who, either from the influence of a stronger mind than his own, or from some natural tendency in himself, has been led to examine those great questions which lie on the threshold of the higher study of theology, and experiences a sort of shrinking or dizziness at the prospect which is opening upon him; let him lay to heart the following considerations:—First, that he may possibly not be the person who is called upon to pursue such inquiries. No man should busy himself with them who has not clearness of mind enough to see things as they are, and a faith strong enough to rest in that degree of knowledge which God has really given; or who is unable to separate the truth from his own religious wants and experiences. For the theologian as well as the philosopher has need of 'dry light',

'unmingled with any tincture of the affections'—the more so as his conclusions are oftener liable to be disordered by them. He who is of another temperament may find another work to do, which is in some respects a higher one. Unlike philosophy, the Gospel has an ideal life to offer, not to a few only, but to all. There is one word of caution, however, to be given to those who renounce inquiry; it is, that they cannot retain the right to condemn inquirers. Their duty is to say with Nicodemus, 'Doth the Gospel condemn any man before it hear him?' although the answer may be only 'Art thou also of Galilee?' They have chosen the path of practical usefulness, and they should acknowledge that it is a narrow path. For any but a 'strong swimmer' will be insensibly drawn out of it by the tide of public opinion or the current of party.

Secondly, let him consider that the difficulty is not so great as imagination sometimes paints it. It is a difficulty which arises chiefly out of differences of education in different classes of society. It is a difficulty which tact, and prudence, and, much more, the power of a Christian life may hope to surmount. Much depends on the manner in which things are said; on the evidence in the writer or preacher of a real good will to his opponents, and a desire for the moral improvement of men. There is an aspect of truth which may always be put forward so as to find a way to the hearts of men. If there is danger and shrinking from one point of view, from another there is freedom and sense of relief. The wider contemplation of the religious world may enable us to adjust our own place in it. The acknowledgement of churches as political and national institutions is the basis of a sound government of them. Criticism itself is not only negative; if it creates some diffi-

culties, it does away others. It may put us at variance with a party or section of Christians in our own neighbourhood. But, on the other hand, it enables us to look at all men as they are in the sight of God, not as they appear to human eye, separated and often interdicted from each other by lines of religious demarcation; it divides us from the parts to unite us to the whole. That is a great help to religious communion. It does away with the supposed opposition of reason and faith. It throws us back on the conviction that religion is a personal thing, in which certainty is to be slowly won and not assumed as the result of evidence or testimony. It places us, in some respects (though it be deemed a paradox to say so), more nearly in the position of the first Christians to whom the New Testament was not given, in whom the Gospel was a living word, not yet embodied in forms or supported by ancient institutions.

Thirdly, the suspicion or difficulty which attends critical inquiries is no reason for doubting their value. The Scripture nowhere leads us to suppose that the circumstance of all men speaking well of us is any ground for supposing that we are acceptable in the sight of God. And there is no reason why the condemnation of others should be witnessed to by our own conscience. Perhaps it may be true that, owing to the jealousy or fear of some, the reticence of others, the terrorism of a few, we may not always find it easy to regard these subjects with calmness and judgement. But, on the other hand, these accidental circumstances have nothing to do with the question at issue; they cannot have the slightest influence on the meaning of words, or on the truth of facts. No one can carry out the principle that public opinion or church authority is the guide to truth,

when he goes beyond the limits of his own church or country. That is a consideration which may well make him pause before he accepts of such a guide in the journey to another world. All the arguments for repressing inquiries into Scripture in Protestant countries hold equally in Italy and Spain for repressing inquiries into matters of fact or doctrine, and so for denying the Scriptures to the common people.

Lastly, let him be assured that there is some nobler idea of truth than is supplied by the opinion of mankind in general, or the voice of parties in a church. Every one, whether a student of theology or not, has need to make war against his prejudices no less than against his passions; and, in the religious teacher, the first is even more necessary than the last. For, while the vices of mankind are in a great degree isolated, and are, at any rate, reprobated by public opinion, their prejudices have a sort of communion or kindred with the world without. They are a collective evil, and have their being in the interest, classes, states of society, and other influences amid which we live. He who takes the prevailing opinions of Christians and decks them out in their gayest colours—who reflects the better mind of the world to itself—is likely to be its favourite teacher. In that ministry of the Gospel, even when assuming forms repulsive to persons of education, no doubt the good is far greater than the error or harm. But there is also a deeper work which is not dependent on the opinions of men, in which many elements combine, some alien to religion, or accidentally at variance with it. That work can hardly expect to win much popular favour, so far as it runs counter to the feelings of religious parties. But he who bears a part in it may feel a confidence, which no popular caresses or religious sympathy could inspire, that he has by a

Divine help been enabled to plant his foot somewhere beyond the waves of time. He may depart hence before the natural term, worn out with intellectual toil; regarded with suspicion by many of his contemporaries; yet not without a sure hope that the love of truth, which men of saintly lives often seem to slight, is, nevertheless, accepted before God.

ESSAY ON THE ABSTRACT IDEAS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

RELIGION and philosophy have often been contrasted as moving in different planes, in which they can never come into contact with each other. Yet there are many meeting-points at which either passes into the circle of the other. One of these meeting-points is language, which loses nothing of its original imperfection by being employed in the service of religion. Its plastic nature is an element of uncertainty in the interpretation of Scripture; its logical structure is a necessary limit on human faculties in the conception of truths above them; whatever growth it is capable of, must affect also the growth of our religious ideas; the analysis we are able to make of it, we must be able also to extend to the theological use of it. Religion cannot place itself above the instrument through which alone it speaks to man; our true wisdom is, therefore, to be aware of their interdependence.

One of the points in which theology and philosophy are brought into connexion by language, is their common usage of abstract words, and of what in the phraseology of some philosophers are termed 'mixed modes', or ideas not yet freed from associations of time or sense. Logicians speak of the abstract and concrete, and of the formation of our abstract ideas: Are the abstractions of Scripture the same in kind with those of philosophy? May we venture to analyse their growth, to ask after their origin, to

compare their meaning in one age of the world and in another? The same words in different languages have not precisely the same meaning. May not this be the case also with abstract terms which have passed from the Old Testament into the New, which have come down to us from the times of the Apostles, hardened by controversy, worn by the use of two thousand years? These questions do not admit of a short and easy answer. Even to make them intelligible, we have to begin some way off, to enter on our inquiry as a speculation rather of logic than of theology, and hereafter to return to its bearing on the interpretation of Scripture.

It is remarked by a great metaphysician, that abstract ideas are, in one point of view, the highest and most philosophical of all our ideas, while in another they are the shallowest and most meagre. They have the advantage of clearness and definiteness; they enable us to conceive and, in a manner, to span the infinity of things; they arrange, as it were, in the frames of a window the many-coloured world of phenomena. And yet they are 'mere' abstractions removed from sense, removed from experience, and detached from the mind in which they arose. Their perfection consists, as their very name implies, in their idealism: that is, in their negative nature.

For example: the idea of 'happiness' has come down from the Greek philosophy. To us it is more entirely freed from etymological associations than it was to Aristotle, and further removed from any particular state of life, or, in other words, it is more of an abstraction. It is what everybody knows, but what nobody can tell. It is not pleasure, nor wealth, nor power, nor virtue, nor contemplation. Could we define it, we seem at first as if we should have found

out the secret of the world. But our next thought is that we should only be defining a word, that it consists rather in a thousand undefinable things which, partly because mankind are not agreed about them, partly because they are too numerous to conceive under any single idea, are dropt by the instinct of language. It means what each person's fancy or experience may lead him to connect with it.; it is a vague conception to his own mind, which nevertheless may be used without vagueness as a middle term in conversing with others.

It is the uniformity in the use of such words that constitutes their true value. Like all other words, they represent in their origin things of sense, facts of experience. But they are no longer pictured by the sense, or tinged by the affections; they are beyond the circle of associations in which they arose. When we use the word happiness, no thought of chance now intrudes itself; when we use the word righteousness, no thought of law or courts; when the word virtue is used, the image no longer presents itself of manly strength or beauty.

The growth of abstract ideas is an after-growth of language itself, which may be compared to the growth of the mind when the body is already at its full stature. All language has been originally the reflection of a world of sense; the words which describe the faculties have once referred to the parts of the body; the name of God himself has been derived in most languages from the sun or the powers of nature. It is indeed impossible for us to say how far, under these earthly and sensual images, there lurked among the primitive peoples of mankind a latent consciousness of the spiritual and invisible; whether the thought or only the word was of the earth earthy. From this garment of the truth it is impossible for

us to separate the truth itself. In this form awhile it appears to grow; even the writers of the Old Testament, in its earlier portion, finding in the winds or the light of heaven the natural expression of the power or holiness of Jehovah. But in process of time another world of thought and expression seems to create itself. The words for courage, strength, beauty, and the like, begin to denote mental and moral qualities; things which were only spoken of as actions, become abstract ideas, the name of God loses all sensual and outward associations; until at the end of the first period of Greek philosophy, the world of abstractions, and the words by which they are expressed, have almost as much definiteness and preciseness of meaning as among ourselves.

This process of forming abstractions is ever going on—the mixed modes of one language are the pure ideas of another; indeed, the adoption of words from dead languages into English has, above all other causes, tended to increase the number of our simple ideas, because the associations of such words, being lost in the transfer, they are at once refined from all alloy of sense and experience. Different languages, or the same at different periods of their history, are at different stages of the process. We can imagine a language, such as language was, as far as the vestiges of it allow us to go back, in its first beginnings, in which every operation of the mind, every idea, every relation, was expressed by a sensible image; a language which we may describe as purely sensual and material, the words of which, like the first written characters, were mental pictures: we can imagine a language in a state which none has ever yet reached, in which the worlds of mind and matter are perfectly separated from each other, and no clog or taint of the one is allowed to enter into the other.

But all languages which exist are in reality between these two extremes, and are passing from one to the other. The Greek of Homer is at a different stage from that of the Greek tragedians; the Greek of the early Ionic philosophers, at a different stage from that of Plato; so, though in a different way (for here there was no advancement), the Greek of Plato as compared with the Neo-Platonist philosophy. The same remark is applicable to the Old Testament, the earlier and later books of which may be, in a similar way, contrasted with each other; almost the whole of which (though here a new language also comes in) exhibits a marked difference from the Apocrypha. The structure of thought insensibly changes. This is the case with all languages which have a literature —they are ever becoming more and more abstract— modern languages, more than ancient; the later stages of either, more than the earlier. It by no means follows that as Greek, Latin, and English have words that correspond in a dictionary, they are real equivalents in meaning, because words, the same, perhaps, etymologically, may be used with different degrees of abstraction, which no accuracy or periphrasis of translation will suffice to express, belonging as they do generally, to the great underlying differences of a whole language.

Another illustration of degrees of abstraction may be found in the language of poetry, or of common life, and the language of philosophy. Poetry, we know, will scarcely endure abstract terms, while they form the stock and staple of morals and metaphysics. They are the language of books, rather than of conversation. Theology, on the other hand, though its problems may seem akin to those of the moralist and metaphysician, yet tends to reject them in the same way that English tends to reject French words,

or poetry to reject prose. He who in paraphrasing Scripture spoke of essence, matter, vice, crime, would be thought guilty of a want of taste; the reason of which is, that these abstract terms are not within the circle of our Scripture associations. They carry us into another age or country or school of thought—to the ear of the uneducated they have an unusual sound, while to the educated they appear to involve an anachronism or to be out of place. Vice, they say, is the moral, sin the theological term; nature and law are the proper words in a treatise on physiology, while the actions of which they are the imaginary causes would in a prayer or sermon be suitably ascribed to the Divine Being.

Our subject admits of another illustration from the language of the Fathers as compared with that of Scripture. Those who have observed the circumstance naturally ask why it is that Scriptural expressions when they reappear in the early patristic literature slightly change their signification? that a greater degree of personality is given to one word, more definiteness to another, while a third has been singled out to be the centre of a scheme of doctrine? The reason is, that use, and reflection, and controversy do not allow language to remain where it was. Time itself is the great innovator in the sense of words. No one supposes that the meaning of conscience or imagination exactly corresponds to the Latin 'conscientia' or 'imaginatio'. Even within the limits of our own language the terms of the scholastic philosophy have acquired and lost a technical signification. And several changes have taken place in the language of creeds and articles, which, by their very attempt to define and systematize, have slightly though imperceptibly departed from the use of words in Scripture.

The principle of which all these instances are illustrations leads to important results in the interpretation of Scripture. It tends to show, that in using the same words with St. Paul we may not be using them in precisely the same sense. Nay, that the very exactness with which we apply them, the result of the definitions, oppositions, associations, of ages of controversy, is of itself a difference of meaning. The mere lapse of time tends to make the similarity deceitful. For if the language of Scripture (to use an expression which will have been made intelligible by the preceding remarks) be really at a different stage of abstraction, great differences in the use of language will occur, such as in each particular word escape and perplex us, and yet, on a survey of the whole, are palpable and evident.

A well-known difficulty in the interpretation of the Epistles is the seemingly uncertain use of δικαιοσύνη, ἀλήθεια, ἀγάπη, πίστις, δόξα, &c., words apparently the most simple, and yet taking sometimes in the same passage different shades and colours of meaning. Sometimes they are attributes of God, in other passages qualities in man; here realities, there mere ideas, sometimes active, sometimes passive. Some of them, as ἁμαρτία, πίστις, have a sort of personality assigned to them, while others, as πνεῦμα, with which we associate the idea of a person, seem to lose their personality. They are used with genitive cases after them, which we are compelled to explain in various senses. In the technical language of German philosophy, they are objective and subjective at once. For example: in the first chapter of the Romans, ver. 17, it is asked by commentators, 'Whether the righteousness of God, which is revealed in the Gospel,' is the original righteousness of God from the beginning, or the righteousness which He imparts to man, the

righteousness of God in Himself or in man. So again, in chap. v, ver. 5, it is doubted whether the words ὅτι ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ ἐκκέχυται ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις, refer to the love of God in man, or the love of God to man. So πνεῦμα θεοῦ wavers in meaning between a separate existence, or the spirit of God, as we should say the 'mind of man', and the manifestation of that spirit in the soul of the believer. Similar apparent ambiguities occur in such expressions as πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὑπομονὴ Χριστοῦ, ἀλήθεια θεοῦ, δόξα θεοῦ, σοφία θεοῦ, and several others.

A difficulty akin to this arises from the apparently numerous senses in which another class of words, such as νόμος, ζωή, θάνατος are used in the Epistles of St. Paul. That νόμος should sometimes signify the law of Moses, at other times the law of the conscience, and that it should be often uncertain whether ζωή referred to a life spiritual or natural, is inconceivable, if these words had had the same precise and defined sense that the corresponding English words have amongst ourselves. The class of expressions before mentioned seems to widen and extend in meaning as they are brought into contact with God and the human soul, or transferred from things earthly and temporal to things heavenly and spiritual. The subtle transformation which these latter words undergo, may be best described as a metaphorical or analogous use of them: not, to take a single instance, that the meaning of the word 'law' is so widened as to include all 'law', but that the law of Moses becomes the figure or type of the law written on the heart, or of the law of sin and death, and ζωή, the natural life, the figure of the spiritual. Each word is a reflector of many thoughts, and we pass, from one reflection of it to another in successive verses.

That such verbal difficulties occur much more often

in Scripture than in any other book, will be generally admitted. In Plato and Aristotle, for example, they can be hardly said to exist at all. What they meant by εἶδος or οὐσία is hard to conceive, but their use of the words does not waver in successive sentences. The language of the Greek philosophy is, on the whole, precise and definite. A much nearer parallel to what may be termed the infinity of Scripture is to be found in the Jewish Alexandrian writings. There is the same transition from the personal to the impersonal, the same figurative use of language, the same tendency to realize and speak of all things in reference to God and the human soul. The mind existed prior to the ideas, which are therefore conceived of as its qualities or attributes, and naturally coalesced with it in the Alexandrian phraseology.

The difficulty of which we have been speaking, when considered in its whole extent, is its own solution. It does but force upon us the fact, that the use of language and the mode of thought are different in the writings of the Apostle from what they are amongst ourselves. It is the difficulty of a person who should set himself to explain the structure of a language which he did not know, by one which he did, and at last, in despair, begin to learn the new idiom. Or the difficulty that a person would have in understanding poetry, who imagined it to be prose. It is the difficulty that Aristotle or Cicero found in understanding the philosophers that were before them. They were familiar with the meaning of the words used by them, but not with the mode of thought. Logic itself had increased the difficulty to them of understanding the times before logic.

This is our own difficulty in the interpretation of Scripture. Our use of language is more definite, our abstractions more abstract, our structure more regular

and logical. But the moment we perceive and allow for this difference in the use of language in Scripture and among ourselves, the difficulty vanishes. We conceive ideas in a process of formation, falling from inspired lips, growing in the minds of men. We throw ourselves into the world of 'mixed modes', and seek to recall the associations which the technical terms of theology no longer suggest. We observe what may be termed the difference of level in our own ideas and those of the first Christians, without disturbing the meaning of one word in relation to another.

The difficulty while it is increased, is also explained by the personifying character of the age. Ideas in the New Testament are relative to the mind of God or man, in which they seem naturally to inhere so as scarcely, in the usage of language, to have an independent existence. There is ever the tendency to speak of good and virtue and righteousness as inseparable from the Divine nature, while in evil of every sort a reflection of conscience seems to be included. The words δικαιοσύνη, ἀλήθεια, ἀγάπη, are not merely equivalent to righteousness, truth, love, but connect imperceptibly with 'the Author and Father of lights'. There is no other righteousness or truth but that of God, just as there is no sin without the consciousness of sin in man. Consequently, the two thoughts coalesce in one, and what are to us ideas, which we can imagine existing even without God, are to the Israelite attributes of God Himself. Still, in our 'mixed modes' we must make a further step; for as these ideas cannot be separated from God, so neither can they be conceived of, except as revealed in the Gospel, and working in the heart of man. Man who is righteous has no righteousness of his own, his righteousness is the righteousness of God in him. Hence, when considering the righteousness of God,

we must go on to conceive of it as the revelation of His righteousness, without which it would be unknown and unmeaning to us. The abstract must become concrete, and must involve at once the attribute of God and the quality in man. This 'concrete' notion of the word righteousness is different from the abstract one with which we are familiar. Righteousness is the righteousness of God; it is also the communion of that righteousness with man. It is used almost with the same double meaning as we attribute to the will of God, which we speak of actively, as intending, doing, and passively, as done, fulfilled by ourselves.

A part of this embarrassment in the interpretation of Scripture arises out of the unconscious influence of English words and ideas on our minds, in translating from Hellenistic Greek. The difficulty is still more apparent, when the attempt is made to render the Scriptures into a language which has not been framed or moulded on Christianity. It is a curious question, the consideration of which is not without practical use, how far the nicer shades either of Scriptural expression or of later theology are capable of being made intelligible in the languages of India or China.

Yet, on the other hand, it must be remembered, that neither this nor any of the other peculiarities here spoken of, is a mere form of speech, but enters deeply into the nature of the Gospel. For the Gospel has necessarily its mixed modes, not merely because it is preached to the poor, and therefore adopts the expressions of ordinary life; nor because its language is incrusted with the phraseology of the Alexandrian writers; but because its subject is mixed, and, as it were, intermediate between God and man. Natural theology speaks clearly, but it is of God only; moral philosophy speaks clearly, but it is of man only: but

the Gospel is, as it were, the communion of God and man, and its ideas are in a state of transition or oscillation, having two aspects towards God and towards man, which it is hard to keep in view at once. Thus, to quote once more the example just given, the righteousness of God is an idea not difficult to us to comprehend, human justice and goodness are also intelligible; but to conceive justice or righteousness as passing from heaven to earth, from God to man, *actu et potentiâ* at once, as a sort of life, or stream, or motion, is perplexing. And yet this notion of the communion of the righteousness of God being what constitutes righteousness, is of the very essence of the Gospel. It was what the Apostle and the first believers meant and felt, and what, if we could get the simple unlettered Christian, receiving the Gospel as a little child, to describe to us his feelings, he would describe.

Scripture language may thus be truly said to belong to an intermediate world, different at once both from the visible and invisible world, yet partaking of the nature of both. It does not represent the things that the eye sees merely, nor the things that are within the veil of which those are the images, but rather the world that is in our hearts; the things that we feel, but nobody can express in words. His body is the communion of His body; His spirit is the communion of His spirit; the love of God is 'loving as we are loved'; the knowledge of God is 'knowing as we are known'; the righteousness of faith is Divine as well as human. Hence language seems to burst its bounds in the attempt to express the different aspects of these truths, and from its very inadequacy wavers and becomes uncertain in its meaning. The more intensely we feel and believe, and the less we are able to define our feelings, the more shall

we appear to use words at random; employing sometimes one mode of expression, sometimes another; passing from one thought to another, by slender threads of association; 'going off upon a word,' as it has been called; because in our own minds all is connected, and, as it were, fulfilled with itself, and from the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. To understand the language of St. Paul it is necessary, not only to compare the uses of words with one another, or to be versed in Alexandrian modes of thought, but to lead the life of St. Paul, to have the mind of St. Paul, to be one with Christ, to be dead to sin. Otherwise the world within becomes unmeaning to us. The inversion of all human things of which he speaks, is attributed to the manner of his time, or the peculiarity of his individual character; and at the very moment when we seem to have attained most accurately the Apostle's meaning, it vanishes away like a shadow.

No human eye can pierce the cloud which overhangs another life; no faculty of man can 'by understanding find out' or express in words the Divine nature. Yet it does not follow that our ideas of spiritual things are wholly indefinite. There are many symbols and images of them in the world without and below. There is a communion of thoughts, feelings, and affections, even on earth, quite sufficient to be an image of the communion with God and Christ, of which the Epistles speak to us. There are emotions, and transitions, and passings out of ourselves, and states of undefined consciousness, which language is equally unable to express as it is to describe justification, or the work of grace, or the relation of the believer to his Lord. All these are rather intimated than described or defined by words. The sigh of sorrow, the cry of joy or despair, are but inarticulate

sounds, yet expressive, beyond the power of writing, or speech. There are many such 'still small voices' of warning or of consolation in Scripture, beyond the power of philosophy to analyse, yet full of meaning to him who catches them aright. The life and force of such expressions do not depend on the clearness with which they state a logical proposition, or the vividness with which they picture to the imagination a spiritual world. They gain for themselves a truth in the individual soul. Even logic itself affords negative helps to the feebleness of man in the conception of things above him. It limits us by our own faculties; it guards us against identifying the images of things unseen with the 'very things themselves'; it bars remote inferences about terms which are really metaphorical. Lastly, it helps us to define by opposition. Though we do not know what spirit is, we know what body is, and we conceive of spirit as what body is not. 'There is a spiritual body, and there is a natural body.' We imagine it at once both like and unlike. We do not know what heaven, or the glory of God, or His wisdom, is; but we imagine them unlike this world, or the wisdom of this world, or the glory of the princes of this world, and yet, in a certain way, like them, imaged and symbolized by what we see around us. We do not know what eternity is, except as the negative of time; but believing in its real existence, in a way beyond our faculties to comprehend, we do not confine it within the limits of past, present, or future. We are unable to reconcile the power of God and the freedom of man, or the contrast of this world and another, or even the opposite feelings of our own minds about the truths of religion. But we can describe them as the Apostle has done, in a paradox (2 Cor. iv. 12; vi. 8–10).

There is yet a further way in which the ideas of Scripture may be defined, that is, by use. It has been already observed that the progress of language is from the concrete to the abstract. Not the least striking instance of this is the language of theology. Embodied in creeds, it gradually becomes developed and precise. The words are no longer 'living creatures with hands and feet', as it were, feeling after the hearts of men; but they have one distinct, unchanging meaning. When we speak of justification or truth, no question arises whether by this is meant the attribute of God, or the quality in man. Time and usage have sufficiently circumscribed the diversities of their signification. This is not to be regarded as a misfortune to Scriptural truth, but as natural and necessary. Part of what is lost in power and life is regained in certainty and definiteness. The usage of language itself would forbid us, in a discourse or sermon, to give as many senses to the word 'law' as are attributed to it by St. Paul. Only in the interpretation of Scripture, if we would feel as St. Paul felt, or think as he thought, it is necessary to go back to that age before creeds, in which the water of life was still a running stream.

The course of speculation which has been adopted in this essay, may seem to introduce into Scripture an element of uncertainty. It may seem to cloud truth with metaphysics, and rob the poor and uneducated of the simplicity of the Gospel. But perhaps this is not so. Whether it be the case that such speculations introduce an element of uncertainty or difficulty into Scripture or not, they introduce a new element of truth. For without the consideration of such questions as that of which a brief sketch has been here attempted, there is no basis for Scriptural interpretation. We are ever liable to draw the

meaning of words this way or that, according to the theological system of which we are the advocates; to fall under the slavery of an illogical logic, which first narrows the mind by definitions, and then wearies it with far-fetched inferences. Metaphysics must enter into the interpretation of Scripture, not for the sake of intruding upon it a new set of words or ideas, but with the view of getting rid of metaphysics and restoring to Scripture its natural sense.

But the Gospel is still preached to the poor as before, in the same sacred yet familiar language. They could not understand questions of grammar before; they do not understand modes of thought now. It is the peculiar nature of our religious ideas that we are able to apply them, and to receive comfort from them, without being able to analyse or explain them. All the metaphysical and logical speculations in the world will not rob the poor, the sick, or the dying of the truths of the Gospel. Yet the subject which we have been considering is not without a practical result. It warns us to restore the Gospel to its simplicity, to turn from the letter to the spirit, to withdraw from the number of the essentials of Christianity points almost too subtle for the naked eye, which depend on modes of thought or Alexandrian usages, to require no more of preciseness or definition than is necessary to give form and substance to our teaching. Not only the feebleness of human faculties, but the imperfection of language itself, will often make silence our truest wisdom. The saying of Scaliger, taken not seriously but in irony, is full of meaning: 'Many a man has missed of his salvation from ignorance of grammar.'

To the poor and uneducated, at times to all, no better advice can be given for the understanding of Scripture than to read the Bible humbly with prayer.

The critical and metaphysical student requires another sort of rule for which this can never be made a substitute. His duty is to throw himself back into the times, the modes of thought, the language of the Apostolic age. He must pass from the abstract to the concrete, from the ideal and intellectual to the spiritual, from later statements of faith or doctrine to the words of inspiration which fell from the lips of the first believers. He must seek to conceive the religion of Christ in its relation to the religions of other ages and distant countries, to the philosophy of our own or other times; and if in this effort his mind seems to fail or waver, he must win back in life and practice the hold on the truths of the Gospel which he is beginning to lose in the mazes of speculation.

ESSAY ON

THE OLD TESTAMENT

ROMANS IV.

Ἡνίκα δ' ἂν ἐπιστρέψῃ πρὸς κύριον, περιαιρεῖται τὸ κάλυμμα.
2 Cor. iii. 16.

THUS we have reached another stage in the development of the great theme. The new commandment has become old; faith is taught in the Book of the Law. 'Abraham had faith in God, and it was counted to him for righteousness.' David spoke of the forgiveness of sins in the very spirit of the Gospel. The Old Testament is not dead, but alive again. It refers not to the past, but to the present. The truths which we daily feel, are written in its pages. There are the consciousness of sin and the sense of acceptance. There is the veiled remembrance of a former world, which is also the veiled image of a future one.

To us the Old and New Testaments are two books, or two parts of the same book, which fit into one another, and can never be separated or torn asunder. They are double one against the other, and the New Testament is the revelation of the Old. To the first believers it was otherwise: as yet there was no New Testament; nor is there any trace that the authors of the New Testament ever expected their own writings to be placed on a level with the Old. We can scarcely imagine what would have been the feeling of St. Paul, could he have foreseen that later ages would look not to the faith of Abraham in the law,

but to the Epistle to the Romans, as the highest authority on the doctrine of justification by faith; or that they would have regarded the allegory of Hagar and Sarah, in the Epistle to the Galatians, as a difficulty to be resolved by the inspiration of the Apostle. Neither he who wrote, nor those to whom he wrote, could ever have thought that words which were meant for a particular Church were to give life also to all mankind; and that the Epistles in which they occurred were one day to be placed on a level with the Books of Moses themselves.

But if the writings of the New Testament were regarded by the contemporaries of the Apostle in a manner different from that of later ages, there was a difference, which it is far more difficult for us to appreciate, in their manner of reading the Old Testament. To them it was not half, but the whole, needing nothing to be added to it or to counteract it, but containing everything in itself. It seemed to come home to them; to be meant specially for their age; to be understood by them, as its words had never been understood before. 'Did not their hearts burn within them?' as the Apostles expounded to them the Psalms and Prophets. The manner of this exposition was that of the age in which they lived. They brought to the understanding of it, not a knowledge of the volume of the New Testament, but the mind of Christ. Sometimes they found the lesson which they sought in the plain language of Scripture; at other times, coming round to the same lesson by the paths of allegory, or seeming even in the sound of a word to catch an echo of the Redeemer's name. Various as are the writings of the Old Testament, composed by such numerous authors, at so many different times, so diverse in style and subject, in them all they read only—the truth of

Christ. They read without distinctions of moral and ceremonial, type and antitype, history and prophecy, without inquiries into the original meaning or connexion of passages, without theories of the relation of the Old and New Testaments. Whatever contrast existed was of another kind, not of the parts of a book, but of the law and faith; of the earlier and later dispensations. The words of the book were all equally for their instruction; the whole volume lighted up with new meaning.

What was then joined cannot now be divided or put asunder. The New Testament will never be unclothed of the Old. No one in later ages can place himself in the position of the heathen convert who learnt the name of Christ first, afterwards the Law and the Prophets. Such instances were probably rare even in the first days of the Christian Church. No one can easily imagine the manner in which St. Paul himself sets the Law over against the Gospel, and at the same time translates one into the language of the other. Time has closed up the rent which the law made in the heart of man; and the superficial resemblances on which the Apostle sometimes dwells, have not the same force to us which they had to his contemporaries. But a real unity remains to ourselves as well as to the Apostle, the unity not of the letter, but of the spirit, like the unity of life or of a human soul, which lasts on amid the changes of our being. The Old Testament and the New do not dovetail into one another like the parts of an indenture; it is a higher figure than this, which is needed to describe the continuity of the Divine work. Or rather, the simple fact is above all figures, and can receive no addition from philosophical notions of design, or the observation of minute coincidences. What we term the Old and New dispensa-

tion is the increasing revelation of God, amid the accidents of human history: first, in Himself; secondly, in His Son, gathering not one nation only, but all mankind into His family. It is the vision of God Himself, true and just, and remembering mercy in one age of the world; not ceasing to be true and just, but softening also into human gentleness, and love, and forgiveness, and making His dwelling in the human heart in another. The wind, and the earthquake, and the fire pass by first, and after that 'the still small voice'. This is the great fulfilment of the Law and the Prophets in the Gospel. No other religion has anything like it. And the use of language, and systems of theology, and the necessity of 'giving ideas through something', and the prayers and thoughts of eighteen hundred years, have formed another connexion between the Old and New Testament, more accidental and outward, and also more intricate and complex, which is incapable of being accurately drawn out, and ought not to be imposed as an article of faith; which yet seems to many to supply a want in human nature, and gives expression to feelings which would otherwise be unuttered.

It is not natural, nor perhaps possible, to us to cease to use the figures in which 'holy men of old' spoke of that which belonged to their peace. But it is well that we should sometimes remind ourselves, that 'all these things are a shadow, but the body is of Christ'. Framed as our minds are, we are ever tending to confuse that which is accidental with that which is essential, to substitute the language of imagery for the severity of our moral ideas, to entangle Divine truths in the state of society in which they came into the world or in the ways of thought of a particular age. 'All these things are a shadow'; that is to say, not only the temple and tabernacle,

and the victim laid on the altar, and the atonement offered once a year for the sins of the nation; but the conceptions which later ages express by these words, so far as anything human or outward or figurative mingles with them, so far as they cloud the Divine nature with human passions, so far as they imply, or seem to imply, anything at variance with our notions of truth and right, are as much, or even more a shadow than that outward image which belonged to the elder dispensation. The same Lord who compared the scribe instructed in the kingdom of heaven to a householder who brought forth out of his treasure things new and old, said also in a figure, that 'new cloth must not be put on an old garment' or 'new wine into old bottles'.

ESSAY ON

CONTRASTS OF PROPHECY

ROMANS XI.

EVERY reader of the Epistles must have remarked the opposite and apparently inconsistent uses, which the Apostle St. Paul makes of the Old Testament. This appearance of inconsistency arises out of the different and almost conflicting statements, which may be read in the Old Testament itself. The law and the prophets are their own witnesses, but they are witnesses also to a truth which is beyond them. Two spirits are found in them, and the Apostle sets aside the one, that he may establish the other. When he says that 'the man that doeth these things shall live in them', x. 5, and again two verses afterwards, 'the word is very nigh unto thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart,' he is using the authority of the law, first, that out of its own mouth he may condemn the law; secondly, that he may confirm the Gospel by the authority of that which he condemns. Still more striking are the contrasts of prophecy in which he reads, not only the rejection of Israel, but its restoration; the over-ruling providence of God, as well as the free agency of man; not only as it is written, 'God gave unto them a spirit of heaviness,' but, 'who hath believed our report;' nor only, 'all day long I have stretched forth my hand to a disobedient and gainsaying people,' but 'there shall come out of Sion a deliverer and He shall turn away

iniquities from Jacob'. Experience and faith seem to contend together in the Apostle's own mind, and alike to find an echo in the two voices of prophecy.

It were much to be wished that we could agree upon a chronological arrangement of the Old Testament, which would approach more nearly to the true order in which the books were written, than that in which they have been handed down to us. Such an arrangement would throw great light on the interpretation of prophecy. At present, we scarcely resist the illusion exercised upon our minds by 'four prophets the greater, followed by twelve prophets the less'; some of the latter being of a prior date to any of the former. Even the distinction of the law and the prophets as well as of the Psalms and the prophets leads indirectly to a similar error. For many elements of the prophetical spirit enter into the law, and legal precepts are repeated by the prophets. The continuity of Jewish history is further broken by the Apocrypha. The four centuries before Christ were as fruitful of hopes and struggles and changes of thought and feeling in the Jewish people as any preceding period of their existence as a nation, perhaps more so. And yet we piece together the Old and New Testament as if the interval were blank leaves only. Few, if any, English writers have ever attempted to form a conception of the growth of the spirit of prophecy, from its first beginnings in the law itself, as it may be traced in the lives and characters of Samuel and David, and above all, of Elijah and his immediate successor; as it reappears a few years later, in the written prophecies respecting the house of Israel, and the surrounding nations (not even in the oldest of the prophets, without reference to Messiah's kingdom); or again after the carrying away of the ten tribes, as it concentrates itself in

Judah, uttering a sadder and more mournful cry in the hour of captivity, yet in the multitude of sorrows increasing the comfort; the very dispersion of the people widening the prospect of Christ's kingdom, as the nation 'is cut short in righteousness', God being so much the nearer to those who draw near to Him.

The fulfilment of prophecy has been sought for in a series of events which have been sometimes bent to make them fit, and one series of events has frequently taken the place of another. Even the passing circumstances of to-day or yesterday, at the distance of about two thousand years, and as many miles, which are but shadows flitting on the mountains compared with the deeper foundations of human history, are thought to be within the range of the prophet's eye. And it may be feared that, in attempting to establish a claim which, if it could be proved, might be made also for heathen oracles and prophecies, commentators have sometimes lost sight of those great characteristics which distinguish Hebrew prophecy from all other professing revelations of other religions: (1) the sense of the truthfulness, and holiness, and loving-kindness of the Divine Being, with which the prophet is as one possessed, which he can no more forget or doubt than he can cease to be himself; (2) their growth, that is, their growing perception of the moral nature of the revelation of God to man, apart from the commandments of the law or the privileges of the house of Israel.

There are some prophecies more national, of which the fortunes of the Jewish people are the only subject; others more individual, seeming to enter more into the recesses of the human soul, and which are, at the same time, more universal, rising above earthly things, and passing into the distant heaven. At one time

the prophet embodies 'these thoughts of many hearts' as present, at another as future; in some cases as following out of the irrevocable decree of God, in others as dependent on the sin or repentance of man. At one moment he is looking for the destruction of Israel, at another for its consolation; going from one of these aspects of the heavenly vision to another, like St. Paul himself in successive verses. And sometimes he sees the Lord's house exalted in the top of the mountains, and the image of the 'Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty Prince, the Everlasting God'. At other times, his vision is of the Servant whom it 'pleased the Lord to bruise', whose form was 'marred more than that of the sons of men', who was 'led as a lamb to the slaughter'.

National, individual,—spiritual, temporal,—present, future,—rejection, restoration,—faith, the law, —Providence, freewill,—mercy, sacrifice,—Messiah suffering and triumphant,—are so many pairs of opposites with reference to which the structure of prophecy admits of being examined. It is true that such an examination is nothing more than a translation or decomposition of prophecy into the modes of thought of our own time, and is far from reproducing the living image which presented itself to the eyes of the prophet. But, like all criticism, it makes us think; it enables us to observe fresh points of connexion between the Old Testament and the New; it keeps us from losing our way in the region of allegory or of modern history. Many things are unlearnt as well as learnt by the aid of criticism; it clears the mind of conventional interpretations, teaching us to look amid the symbols of time and place for the higher and universal meaning.

Prophecy has a human as well as a Divine element: that is to say, it partakes of the ordinary workings

of the mind. There is also something beyond which the analogy of human knowledge fails to explain. Could the prophet himself have been asked what was the nature of that impulse by which he was carried away, he would have replied that 'the God of Israel was a living God' who had 'ordained him a prophet before he came forth from the womb'. Of the Divine element no other account can be given—'it pleased God to raise up individuals in a particular age and country, who had a purer and loftier sense of truth than their fellow men.' Prophecy would be no longer prophecy if we could untwist its soul. But the human part admits of being analysed like poetry or history, of which it is a kind of union; it is written with a man's pen in a known language; it is cast in the imaginative form of early language itself. The truth of God comes into contact with the world, clothing itself in human feelings, revealing the lesson of historical events. But human feelings and the lesson of events vary, and in this sense the prophetic lesson varies too. Even in the workings of our own minds we may perceive this; those who think much about themselves and God cannot but be conscious of great changes and transitions of feeling at different periods of life. We are the creatures of impressions and associations; and although Providence has not made our knowledge of Himself dependent on these impressions, He has allowed it to be coloured by them. We cannot say that in the hours of prosperity and adversity, in health and sickness, in poverty and wealth, our sense of God's dealings with us is absolutely the same; still less, that all our prayers and aspirations have received the answer that we wished or expected. And sometimes the thoughts of our own hearts go before to God; at other times, the power of God seems to anticipate the thoughts of our

hearts. And sometimes, in looking back at our past lives, it seems as if God had done everything; at other times, we are conscious of the movement of our own will. The wide world itself also, and the political fortunes of our country, have been enveloped in the light or darkness which rested on our individual soul.

Especially are we liable to look at religious truth under many aspects, if we live amid changes of religious opinions, or are witnesses of some revival or reaction in religion, or supposing our lot to be cast in critical periods of history, such as extend the range and powers of human nature, or certainly enlarge our experience of it. Then the germs of new truths will subsist side by side with the remains of old ones; and thoughts, that are really inconsistent, will have a place together in our minds, without our being able to perceive their inconsistency. The inconsistency will be traced by posterity; they will remark that up to a particular point we saw clearly; but that no man is beyond his age—there was a circle which we could not pass. And some one living in our own day may look into the future with 'eagle eye'; he may weigh and balance with a sort of omniscience the moral forces of the world, perhaps with something too much of confidence that the right will ultimately prevail even on earth; and after ages may observe that his predictions were not always fulfilled or not fulfilled at the time he said.

Such general reflections may serve as an introduction to what at first appears an anomaly in prophecy, —that it has not one, but many lessons; and that the manner in which it teaches those lessons is through the alternations of the human soul itself. There are failings of prophecy, just as there are failings in our own anticipations of the future. And sometimes

when we had hoped to be delivered it has seemed good to God to afflict us still. But it does not follow that religion is therefore a cunningly devised fable, either now or then. Neither the faith of the people, nor of the prophet, in the God of their fathers is shaken because the prophecies are not realized before their eyes; because 'the vision', as they said, 'is delayed'; because in many cases events seem to occur which make it impossible that it should be accomplished. A true instinct still enables them to separate the prophets of Jehovah from the numberless false prophets with whom the land swarmed; they are gifted with the 'same discernment of spirits' which distinguished Micaiah from the four hundred whom Ahab called. The internal evidence of the true prophet we are able to recognize in the written prophecies also. In the earliest as well as the latest of them there is the same spirit one and continuous, the same witness of the invisible God, the same character of the Jewish people, the same law of justice and mercy in the dealings of Providence with respect to them, the same 'walking with God' in the daily life of the prophet himself.

'Novum Testamentum in vetere latet,' has come to be a favourite word among theologians, who have thought they saw in the truths of the Gospel the original design as well as the evangelical application of the Mosaical law. With a deeper meaning, it may be said that prophecy grows out of itself into the Gospel. Not, as some extreme critics have conceived, that the facts of the Gospel history are but the crystallization of the imagery of prophecy. Say, rather, that the river of the water of life is beginning again to flow. The Son of God himself is 'that prophet'—the prophet, not of one nation only, but of all mankind, in whom the particularity of the old

prophets is finally done away, and the ever-changing form of the 'servant in whom my soul delighteth' at last finds rest. St. Paul, too, is a prophet who has laid aside the poetical and authoritative garb of old times, and is wrapped in the rhetorical or dialectical one of his own age. The language of the old prophets comes unbidden into his mind; it seems to be the natural expression of his own thoughts. Separated from Joel, Amos, Hosea, Micah, and Isaiah by an interval of about eight hundred years, he finds their words very near to him 'even in his mouth and his heart'; that is the word which he preached. When they spoke of forgiveness of sins, of non-imputation of sins, of a sudden turning to God, what did this mean but righteousness by faith? when they said 'I will have mercy, and not sacrifice', here also was imaged the great truth, that salvation was not of the law. If St. Paul would have no 'man judged for a new moon or sabbath', the prophets of old time had again and again said in the name of Jehovah 'Your new moons and sabbaths I cannot away with'. Like the elder prophets, he came not 'to build up a temple made with hands', but to teach a moral truth; like them he went forth alone, and not in connexion with the Church at Jerusalem. His calling is to be Apostle of the Gentiles; they also sometimes pass beyond the borders of Israel, to receive Egypt and Assyria into covenant with God.

It is not, however, this deeper unity between St. Paul and the prophets of the old dispensation that we are about to consider further, but a more superficial parallelism, which is afforded by the alternation or successive representation of the purposes of God towards Israel, which we meet with in the Old Testament, and which recurs in the Epistle to the Romans. Like the elder prophets, St. Paul also 'prophesies in

part', feeling after events rather than seeing them, and divided between opposite aspects of the dealings of Providence with mankind. This changing feeling often finds an expression in the words of Isaiah or the Psalmist, or the author of the book of Deuteronomy. Hence a kind of contrast springs up in the writings of the Apostle, which admits of being traced to its source in the words of the prophets. Portions of his Epistles are the *disjecta membra* of prophecy. Oppositions are brought into view by him, and may be said to give occasion to a struggle in his own mind, which were unobserved by the prophets themselves. For so far from prophecy setting forth one unchanging purpose of God, it seems rather to represent a succession of purposes conditional on men's actions; speaking as distinctly of the rejection as of the restoration of Israel; and of the restoration almost as the correlative of the rejection; often too making a transition from the temporal to the spiritual. Some of these contrasts it is proposed to consider in detail as having an important bearing on St. Paul's Epistles, especially on the Epistles to the Thessalonians, and on chapters x–xii of the Epistles to the Romans.

(1) All the prophets are looking for and hastening to 'the day of the Lord', the 'great day', 'which there is none like,' 'the day of the Lord's sacrifice,' the 'day of visitation', of 'the great slaughter', in which the Lord shall judge 'in the valley of Jehoshaphat', in which 'they shall go into the clefts of the rocks, and into the tops of the ragged rocks, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth'. That day is the fulfilment and realization of prophecy, without which it would cease to have any meaning, just as religion itself would cease to have any meaning to ourselves, were there no future life, or retribution of

good and evil. All the prophets are in spirit present at it; living alone with God, and hardly mingling with men on earth, they are fulfilled with its terrors and its glories. For the earth is not to go on for ever as it is, the wickednesses of the house of Israel are not to last for ever. First, the prophet sees the pouring out of the vials of wrath upon them; then, more at a distance, follows the vision of mercy, in which they are to be comforted, and their enemies, the ministers of God's vengeance on them, in turn punished. And evil and oppression everywhere, so far as it comes within the range of the prophet's eye, is to be punished in that day, and good is to prevail.

In these 'terrors of the day of the Lord', of which the prophets speak, the fortunes of the Jewish people mingle with another vision of a more universal judgement, and it has been usual to have recourse to the double senses of prophecy to separate the one from the other, an instrument of interpretation which has also been applied to the New Testament for the same purpose. Not in this way could the prophet or apostle themselves have conceived them. To them they were not two, but one; not 'double one against the other', or separable into the figure and the thing signified. For the figure is in early ages the mode of conception also. More true would it be to say that the judgements of God on the Jewish people were an anticipation or illustration of His dealings with the world generally. If a separation is made at all, let us rather separate the accidents of time and place from that burning sense of the righteousness of God, which somewhere we cannot tell where, at some time we cannot tell when, must and will have retribution on evil; which has this other note of its Divine character, that in judgement it remembers mercy, pronouncing no endless penalty or irreversible

doom, even upon the house of Israel. This twofold lesson of goodness and severity speaks to us as well as to the Jews. Better still to receive the words of prophecy as we have them, and to allow the feeling which it utters to find its way to our hearts, without stopping to mark out what was not separated in the prophet's own mind and cannot therefore be divided by us.

Other contrasts are traceable in the teaching of the prophets respecting the day of the Lord. In that day the Lord is to judge Israel, and He is to punish Egypt and Assyria; and yet it is said also, the Lord shall heal Egypt, and Israel shall be the third with Egypt and Assyria whom the Lord shall bless (Is. xix. 25). In many of the prophecies also the judgement is of two kinds; it is a judgement on Israel, which is executed by the heathen; it is a judgement against the heathen, and in favour of Israel, in which God himself is sometimes said to be their advocate as well as their judge 'in that day'. A singular parallel with the New Testament is presented by another contrast which occurs in a single passage. That the day of the Lord is near, 'it cometh, it cometh,' is the language of all the prophets; and yet there were those who said also in Ezekiel's time, 'The days are prolonged, and every vision faileth. Tell them therefore, Thus saith the Lord God; I will make this proverb to cease, and they shall no more use it as a proverb in Israel; but say unto them, The days are at hand, and the effect of every vision' (xii. 22, 23). (Compare 2 Pet. iii. 4, 'Where is the promise of his coming?') On the other hand, in the later chapters of Isaiah (xl. seq.) we seem to trace the same feeling as in the New Testament itself: the anticipation of prophecy has ceased; the hour of its fulfilment has arrived; men seem to be conscious

that they are living during the restoration of Israel as the disciples at the day of Pentecost felt that they were living amid the things spoken of by the prophet Joel.

(2) A closer connexion with the Epistle to the Romans is furnished by the double and, on the surface, inconsistent language of prophecy respecting the rejection and restoration of Israel. These seem to follow one another often in successive verses. It is true that the appearance of inconsistency is greater than the reality, owing to the lyrical and concentrated style of prophecy (some of its greatest works being not much longer than this 'cobweb[1]' of an essay); and this leads to opposite feelings and trains of thought being presented to us together, without the preparations and joinings which would be required in the construction of a modern poem. Yet, after making allowance for this peculiarity of the ancient Hebrew style, it seems as if there were two thoughts ever together in the prophet's mind: captivity, restoration,—judgement, mercy,—sin, repentance,—'the people sitting in darkness, and the great light'.

There are portions of prophecy in which the darkness is deep and enduring, 'darkness that may be felt,' in which the prophet is living amid the sins and sufferings of the people; and hope is a long way off from them—when they need to be awakened rather than comforted; and things must be worse, as men say, before they can become better. Such is the spirit of the greater part of the book of Jeremiah. But the tone of prophecy is on the whole that of alternation; God deals with the Israelites as with children; he cannot bear to punish them for long; his heart comes back to them when they are in captivity; their very helplessness gives them a claim

[1] Carlyle.

on him. Vengeance may endure for a time, but soon the full tide of His mercy returns upon them. Another voice is heard, saying, 'Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people.' 'Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and say unto her that she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins.' So from the vision of God on Mount Sinai, at the giving of the Law amid storms and earthquakes, arises that tender human relation in which the Gospel teaches that He stands, not merely to His Church as a body, but to each one of us.

Naturally this human feeling is called forth most in the hour of adversity. As the affliction deepens, the hope also enlarges, seeming often to pass beyond the boundaries of this life into a spiritual world. Though their sins are as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; when Jerusalem is desolate, there shall be a tabernacle on Mount Sion. The formula in which this enlargement of the purposes of God is introduced is itself worthy of notice. 'It shall be no more said, The Lord liveth, that brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; but, The Lord liveth, that brought up the children of Israel from the land of the North, and from all the lands whither he had driven them.' Their old servitude in Egypt came back to their minds now that they were captives in a strange land, and the remembrance that they had already been delivered from it was an earnest that they were yet to return. Deeply rooted in the national mind, it had almost become an attribute of God himself that He was their deliverer from the house of bondage.

With this narrower view of the return of the children of Israel from captivity, not without a remembrance of that great empire which had once extended from the River of Egypt to the Euphrates,

there blended also the hope of another kingdom in which dwelt righteousness—the kingdom of Solomon 'become the kingdom of Christ and God'. The children of Israel had been in their origin 'the fewest of all people', and the most alien to the nations round about. The Lord their God was a jealous God, who would not suffer them to mingle with the idolatries of the heathen. And in that early age of the world, when national life was so strong and individuals so feeble, we cannot conceive how the worship of the true God could have been otherwise preserved. But the day had passed away when the nation could be trusted with the preservation of the faith of Jehovah; 'it had never been good for much at any time.' The prophets, too, seem to withdraw from the scenes of political events; they are no longer the judges and leaders of Israel; it is a part of their mission to commit to writing for the use of after ages the predictions which they utter. We pass into another country, to another kingdom in which the prospect is no more that which Moses saw from Mount Pisgah, but in which the 'Lord's horn is exalted in the top of the mountains, and all nations flock to it'.

In this kingdom the Gentiles have a place, still on the outskirts, but not wholly excluded from the circle of God's providence. Sometimes they are placed on a level with Israel, the 'circumcised with the uncircumcised', as if only to teach the Apostle's lesson, 'that there is no respect of persons with God' (Jer. ix. 25, 26; compare Rom. ii. 12–28). At other times they are themselves the subjects of promises and threatenings (Jer. xii. 14–17). It is to them that God will turn when His patience is exhausted with the rebellions of Israel; for whom it shall be 'more tolerable' than for Israel and Judah in the

day of the Lord. They are those upon whom, though at a distance, the brightness of Jehovah must overflow; who, in the extremities of the earth, are bathed with the light of His presence. Helpers of the joy of Israel, they pour with gifts and offerings through the open gates of the city of God. They have a part in Messiah's kingdom, not of right, but because without them it would be imperfect and incomplete. In one passage only, which is an exception to the general spirit of prophecy, Israel 'makes the third' with Egypt and Assyria, 'whom the Lord of Hosts shall bless' (Is. xix. 18–25).

It was not possible that such should be the relation of the Gentiles to the people of God in the Epistles of St. Paul. Experience seemed to invert the natural order of Providence—the Jew first and afterwards the Gentile. Accordingly, what is subordinate in the prophets, becomes of principal importance in the application of the Apostle. The dark sayings about the Gentiles had more meaning than the utterers of them were aware of. Events connected them with the rejection of the Jews, of which the same prophets spoke. Not only had the Gentiles a place on the outskirts of the people of God, gathering up the fragments of promises 'under the table'; they themselves were the spiritual Israel. When the prophets spoke of the Mount Sion, and all nations flowing to it, they were not expecting literally the restoration of the kingdom to Israel. They spoke of they knew not what—of something that had as yet no existence upon the earth. What that was, the vision on the way to Damascus, no less than the history of the Church and the world, revealed to the Apostle of the Gentiles.

(3) Another characteristic of Hebrew prophecy is the transition from the nation to the individual.

That is to say, first the nation becomes an individual; it is spoken of, thought of, dealt with, as a person, it 'makes the third' with God and the prophet. Almost a sort of drama is enacted between them, the argument of which is the mercy and justice of God; and the Jewish nation itself has many parts assigned to it. Sometimes she is the 'adulterous sister', the 'wife of whoredoms', who has gone astray with Chaldean and Egyptian lovers. In other passages, still retaining the same personal relation to God, the 'daughter of my people' is soothed and comforted; then a new vision rises before the prophet's mind—not the same with that of the Jewish people, but not wholly distinct from it, in which the suffering prophet himself, or Cyrus the prophet king, have a part—the vision of 'the servant of God', 'the Saviour with dyed garments' from Bosra—'he shall grow up before him as a tender plant;' 'he is led as a lamb to the slaughter' (Is. liii. 2, 7; compare Jer. xi. 19). Yet there is a kind of glory even on earth in this image of gentleness and suffering: 'A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, until he hath brought forth judgement unto victory.' We feel it to be strange, and yet it is true. So we have sometimes seen the image of the kingdom of God among ourselves, not in noble churches or scenes of ecclesiastical power or splendour, but in the face of some child or feeble person, who, after overcoming agony, is about to depart and be with Christ.

Analogies from Greek philosophy may seem far-fetched in reference to Hebrew prophecy, yet there are particular points in which subjects the most dissimilar receive a new light from one another. In the writings of Plato and Aristotle, and the philosophers who were their successors, moral truths

gradually separate from politics, and the man is acknowledged to be different from the mere citizen: and there arises a sort of ideal of the individual, who has a responsibility to himself only. The growth of Hebrew prophecy is so different; its figures and modes of conception are so utterly unlike; there seems such a wide gulf between morality which almost excludes God, and religion which exists only in God, that at first sight we are unwilling to allow any similarity to exist between them. Yet an important point in both of them is really the same. For the transition from the nation to the individual is also the more perfect revelation of God Himself, the change from the temporal to the spiritual, from the outward glories of Messiah's reign to the kingdom of God which is within. Prophets as well as apostles teach the near intimate personal relation of man to God. The prophet and psalmist, who is at one moment inspired with the feelings of a whole people, returns again to God to express the lowliest sorrows of the individual Christian. The thought of the Israel of God is latent in prophecy itself, not requiring a great nation or company of believers; 'but where one is' there is God present with him.

There is another way also in which the individual takes the place of the nation in the purposes of God; 'a remnant shall be saved'. In the earlier books of the Old Testament, the whole people is bound up together for good or for evil. In the law especially, there is no trace that particular tribes or individuals are to be singled out for the favour of God. Even their great men are not so much individuals as representatives of the whole people. They serve God as a nation; as a nation they go astray. If, in the earlier times of Jewish history, we suppose an individual good man living 'amid an adulterous and crooked

generation', we can scarcely imagine the relation in which he would stand to the blessings and cursings of the law. Would the righteous perish with the wicked? That be 'far from thee, O Lord'. Yet 'prosperity, the blessing of the Old Testament', was bound up with the existence of the nation. Gradually the germ of the new dispensation begins to unfold itself; the bands which held the nation together are broken in pieces; a fragment only is preserved, a branch, in the Apostle's language, cut off from the patriarchal stem, to be the beginning of another Israel.

The passage quoted by St. Paul in the eleventh chapter of the Romans is the first indication of this change in God's mode of dealing with His people. The prophet Elijah wanders forth into the wilderness to lay before the Lord the iniquities of the people: 'The children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword.' 'But what,' we may ask with the Apostle, 'saith the answer of God to him?' Not 'They are corrupt, they are altogether become abominable', but 'Yet I have seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal'. The whole people were not to be regarded as one; there were a few who still preserved, amid the general corruption, the worship of the true God.

The marked manner in which the answer of God is introduced, the contrast of the 'still small voice' with the thunder, the storm, and the earthquake, the natural symbols of the presence of God in the law—the contradiction of the words spoken to the natural bent of the prophet's mind, and the greatness of Elijah's own character—all tend to stamp this passage as marking one of the epochs of prophecy. The solitude of the prophet and his separation in

'the mount of God', from the places in which 'men ought to worship', are not without meaning. There had not always 'been this proverb in the house of Israel'; but from this time onwards it is repeated again and again. We trace the thought of a remnant to be saved in captivity, or to return from captivity, through a long succession of prophecies—Hosea, Amos, Micah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel;—it is the text of almost all the prophets, passing, as a familiar word, from the Old Testament to the New. The voice uttered to Elijah was the beginning of this new Revelation.

(4) Coincident with the promise of a remnant is the precept, 'I will have mercy and not sacrifice,' which, in modern language, opposes the moral to the ceremonial law. It is another and the greatest step onward towards the spiritual dispensation. Moral and religious truths hang together; no one can admit one of them in the highest sense, without admitting a principle which involves the rest. He who acknowledged that God was a God of mercy and not of sacrifice, could not long have supposed that He dealt with nations only, or that He raised men up for no other end but to be vessels of His wrath or monuments of His vengeance. For a time there might be 'things too hard for him', clouds resting on his earthly tabernacle, when he 'saw the ungodly in such prosperity'; yet had he knowledge enough, as he 'went into the sanctuary of God', and confessed himself to be 'a stranger and pilgrim upon the earth'.

It is in the later prophets that the darkness begins to be dispelled and the ways of God justified to man. Ezekiel is above all others the teacher of this 'new commandment'. The familiar words, 'when the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his

soul alive,' are the theme of a great part of this wonderful book. Other prophets have more of poetical beauty, a deeper sense of Divine things, a tenderer feeling of the mercies of God to His people; none teach so simply this great moral lesson, to us the first of all lessons. On the eve of the captivity, and in the midst of it, when the hour of mercy is past, and no image is too loathsome to describe the iniquities of Israel, still the prophet does not forget that the Lord will not destroy the righteous with the wicked: 'Though Noah, Daniel, and Job were in the land, as I live, saith the Lord, they shall deliver neither son nor daughter; they shall deliver but their own souls by their righteousness' (xiv. 20). 'Yet, behold, therein shall be left a remnant; and they shall know that I have not done without cause all that I have done, saith the Lord' (ver. 22, 23).

It is observable that, in the Book of Ezekiel as well as of Jeremiah, this new principle on which God deals with mankind is recognized as a contradiction to the rule by which he had formerly dealt with them. At the commencement of chap. xviii, as if with the intention of revoking the words of the second commandment, 'visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children,' it is said:—

'The word of the Lord came unto me again, saying,

'What mean ye, that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge?

'*As* I live, saith the Lord GOD, ye shall not have *occasion* any more to use this proverb in Israel.

'Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die.'

Similar language occurs also in Jer. xxxi. 29, in a connexion which makes it still more remarkable, as

the new truth is described as a part of that fuller revelation which God will give of himself, when He makes a new covenant with the house of Israel. And yet the same prophet, as if not at all times conscious of his own lesson, says also in his prayer to God (Lam. v. 7.), 'Our fathers have sinned and are not, and we have borne their iniquities.' The truth which he felt was not one and the same always, but rather two opposite truths, like the Law and the Gospel, which for a while seemed to struggle with one another in the teaching of the prophet and the heart of man.

And yet this opposition was not necessarily conscious to the prophet himself. Isaiah, who saw the whole nation going before to judgement, did not refrain from preaching the lessons, 'If ye be willing and obedient,' and 'Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts'. Ezekiel, the first thought and spirit of whose prophecies might be described in modern language as the responsibility of man, like Micaiah in the Book of Kings, seemed to see the false prophets inspired by Jehovah Himself to their own destruction. As in the prophet, so in the Apostle, there was no sense that the two lessons were in any degree inconsistent with each other. It is an age of criticism and philosophy, which, in making the attempt to conceive the relation of God to the world in a more abstract way, has invented for itself the perplexity, or, may we venture to say, by the very fact of acknowledging it, has also found its solution. The intensity with which the prophet felt the truths that he revealed, the force with which he uttered them, the desire with which he yearned after their fulfilment, have passed from the earth; but the truths themselves remain an everlasting possession. We seem to look upon them more calmly, and adjust them more truly. They no longer break through the world of

sight with unequal power: they can never again be confused with the accidents of time and place. The history of the Jewish people has ceased to be the only tabernacle in which they are enshrined; they have an independent existence, and a light and order of their own.

ON THE PROBABILITY THAT MANY OF ST. PAUL'S EPISTLES HAVE BEEN LOST

'Εν πάσῃ ἐπιστολῇ—'In every Epistle.'—2 Thess. iii. 17.

THESE three words, dropping out by the way, open a field for reflection to those who maintain the genuineness of the Epistle in which they occur, because they imply, or at least make it probable, that St. Paul wrote other Epistles, which were never reckoned among the Canonical books, and of which all trace must therefore have disappeared in ecclesiastical history, even in that early age in which the Canon was beginning to be fixed.

Other expressions in the writings of the Apostle lead to the same inference. In the second chapter of the Epistle from which they are taken, which it is important to observe is almost the earliest of those extant, and the words of which cannot therefore refer to the Epistles which are familiar to us, he twice speaks of 'a letter as from us', as a common and possible occurrence (ver. 2, 15). In the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, x. 10, the Apostle supposes his adversaries to say 'that his letters are weighty and powerful'; to which he replies in the next verse, 'Such as we are in word by letters when absent, such will we also be in deed when we are present'. Is it likely that the Apostle is here referring to the First Epistle only? The words of 1 Cor. v. 9, 'I wrote unto you in the epistle,' probably allude,

notwithstanding the tense, to the letter which he was writing at the time, and have, therefore, nothing to do with our present inquiry. But the general character of both Epistles to the Corinthians leads to the conviction that he was in habits of correspondence with the teachers of the Church of Corinth. It appears also from 1 Cor. xvi. 3 that he was intending (although the intention in this instance was not fulfilled) to send messengers with letters of introduction, as we term them, to the Church at Jerusalem;—letters of Christian courtesy, of which one only—the short Epistle to Philemon—has been preserved to after-ages. Similar occasions must often have occurred in the course of a long life and ministry; St. Paul did not cease to be St. Paul in his feelings towards others, because what he wrote in the privacy of the closet was not destined to be read afterwards by the whole Christian world. Once more, in the Epistle to the Colossians, iv. 16, the Apostle enjoins the Churches of Colossae and Laodicea to interchange the letters which they had received from him. It is only a conjecture, and one which is not favoured by the similarity of the Epistles to the Colossians and Ephesians, that the Epistle here referred to as the Epistle to the Laodiceans is the extant Epistle to the Ephesians. Here then are signs of another lost Epistle. The allusion in the Second Epistle of St. Peter, iii. 15, 16, 'Even as our beloved brother Paul also, according to the wisdom given unto him, hath written unto you; as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction,' may be mentioned also, though it has only a general bearing on our present subject.

(ii) The character of the Apostle is a further presumption on the same side of the question. He who lives in himself the life of all the Churches, who is praying for his converts night and day, and who allows no other concerns to occupy his mind,—of such an one is it reasonable to suppose that, during his whole ministry, to all his followers in many lands, he would write no other Epistles but those which have come down to us? One might have thought that every year, almost every month, he would have found some exhortation to give to them; that he would have received news of them from some quarter or other touching divisions which required healing, or persecution under which his children needed comfort, or advances of the truth which called for his counsel and sympathy. One might have thought that his affection for them, and his extreme (may we call it?) sensitiveness to their feelings towards himself, would have led him to make use of every opportunity for writing to them or hearing from them. He who had no rest in his soul until he had sent Timothy to know their state, could not have borne to have passed a great portion of his life without knowledge of them or intercourse with them. But if so, the Canonical Epistles or Letters cannot be the only ones of which the Apostle was the author. For, including the Pastoral Epistles, their number is but thirteen, not one in two years for the entire active portion of the Apostle's life, and these very unequally spread over different periods. Of the first ten or fifteen years no Epistle is extant; then two short ones begin the series; after an interval of some years succeeded by another short one: then in a single year follow the three larger Epistles together, more than half the whole: lastly, in the years of his imprisonment, we have not much more than a short Epistle for every

year. Is it likely that there were no others?—or are we suffering ourselves to be imposed upon by the fear of disturbing a natural but superficial impression?

(iii) The Epistles which are extant, with the exception of the Epistle to the Romans, are unlike the compositions of one who in his whole life wrote only ten letters. They are too lively and draw too near to the hearts of men. Those especially to the Thessalonians, Corinthians, Galatians, and Colossians (compare Philemon) imply habits of familiar intercourse between the Apostle and the distant Churches. Messengers are passing from him to them, and he is minutely informed of their circumstances. There is no trace of ignorance on the Apostle's part of what is going on among them. There is none of that natural formality which grows up in letters between unknown persons. Would the Apostle have written to a Church which he only addressed once in his life in a style which is more like talking than writing?—and without the least allusion anywhere to the singularity of the circumstance of his writing to them?

But if, as the allusions which have been mentioned and the reason of the thing, and the style of the extant Epistles themselves, lead us to suppose, St. Paul wrote other Epistles, which have not been handed down to us, then many reflections arise in our minds, some of which have an important bearing on the interpretation of Scripture.

1. It has been observed that within a single year of his life the Apostle wrote the Epistle to the Romans and the two Epistles to the Corinthians, which are in quantity equal to more than half the whole of his Epistles, and not much short of a seventh portion of the entire New Testament. Nor is it certain that

these were the only Epistles written by him in the same year: the reverse is more likely. Now suppose we take this as the criterion of the probable amount of his lost writings, and that during each year of his ministry, which extended over a period of at least twenty-five years, he wrote an equal quantity,—though it would not be true to say that 'the world itself would not contain the books that would have been written,' yet the result would have been a volume three times the size of the New Testament. There is nothing extravagant in this speculation, although there is no proof of it; the allusions to lost Epistles make the idea extremely probable. Nor would any one think it extravagant if the Apostle had not been one of the Canonical writers, whose writings we are accustomed to regard as supernaturally preserved to us.

2. Suppose, further, that in a distant part of the world, in some Syriac, or Armenian, or Aethiopic transcript, or even in its original language, buried in the unexcavated portions of Herculaneum or Pompeii, one of these lost Epistles were suddenly brought to light: with what feelings would it be received by the astonished world! The return of the Apostle himself to earth would hardly be a more surprising event. There are minds to whom such a discovery would seem to involve more danger than the loss of an Epistle which we already have. It is not impossible that it might be suppressed or ever it found its way to the Christian public. Suppose it to escape this fate; it is printed and translated: with what anxiety do men turn over its pages, to find in them something which has a bearing on this or that controverted point! If touching upon disputed matters, is it too much to conceive that it would not find equal acceptance with disputants on both sides—supposing that it

favoured one of them rather than the other? Time would elapse before the new Epistle would find its way into the language of theology. There would be no Fathers or Commentators to overlay it with traditional interpretations. It is strange but also true that it could never receive the deference and respect which has attached to those more legitimate Epistles in the possession of which the Christian Church has gloried for above eighteen centuries. And some one standing aloof might ask whether any article of faith which such an accident might disturb could be necessary to salvation.

3. Another supposition may be raised of the discovery not of one but of many lost Epistles of St. Paul, which suggests a new question. Would the balance of Christian truth be thereby altered? Not so. A moment's reflection will remind us that the servant is not above his Lord, nor the disciple above his Master. If we have failed to gather from the words of Christ the spirit of the Gospel, a new Epistle of St. Paul would hardly enlighten us; if we are partakers of that spirit we have more religious knowledge than it is possible to exhaust on earth. The alarm is no sooner raised than dispelled. The chief use of bringing the supposition before our minds is to remind us of the simplicity of the faith of Christ. It may help to indicate also to the theological student the nature of the problem which he has to consider in the interpretation of Scripture, at once harder and easier than he at first supposed,—easier because simpler, harder because beset with artificial difficulties. Were the Epistles bearing the name of St. Paul not ten but thirty in number, a great change would take place in our mode of studying them. Is it not their shortness which provokes microscopic criticism?—the scantiness of materials giving rise to conjectures, the

fragmentary thought itself provoking system? Words and phrases such as 'justification by faith without the works of the law' could not have had such a powerful and exclusive influence on the theology of after times had they been found in two only out of thirty Epistles. Theories and constructions soon come to an end when materials are abundant; ingenuity ceases to make an attempt to fill up the blanks of knowledge when the mind is distinctly conscious that it is dealing not with the whole but with a part only.

4. No difference is made by the supposition which has been raised respecting the extant Epistles considered as a rule of life and practice. Almost any one of them is a complete witness to the Author and Finisher of our faith; a complete text-book of the truths of the Gospel. But it is obvious that the supposition, or rather the simple fact, that Epistles have been lost which were written by St. Paul, is inconsistent with the theory of a plan which is sometimes attributed to the extant ones, which are regarded as a temple having many parts, even as there are many members in one body, and all members have not the same office. A mistaken idea of design is one of the most attractive errors in the interpretation of Scripture no less than of nature. No such plan or unity can be really conceived as existing in the Apostle's own mind; for he could never have distinguished between the Epistles destined to be lost and those which have been allowed to survive. And to attribute such a plan to an overruling Providence would be an arbitrary fancy, involving not inspiration, but the supernatural selection and preservation of particular Epistles, and destructive to all natural ideas of the Gospel. It is a striking illustration of what may be termed the incidental character of Christianity, that (not without a Providence in this as in all

other earthly things) some of the Epistles of St. Paul, in the course of nature, as if by chance, are for ever lost to us; while others, as if by chance, are handed down to be the treasures of the Christian world throughout all ages.

5. There is no reason to suppose that those Epistles of St. Paul which have been preserved were more sacred or inspired than those which were lost, or either more so than his discourses in the synagogue at Thessalonica during 'three Sabbath days', at Athens, at Corinth, at Rome, or the other places in which he preached the Gospel. The supposition of the lost Epistles indefinitely extends itself when we think of lost words. Of these it might be truly said, 'that if they were written every one, even the world itself would not contain the books that should be written.' The writings of the Apostle, like the words of our Saviour, are but a fragment of his life. And they must be restored to their context before they can be truly understood. They do not acquire any real sacredness by isolation from the rest. It would be a loss, not a gain, to deprive the New Testament of its natural human character,—instead of receiving a higher and diviner meaning, it would only be reduced to a level with the sacred writings of the Asiatic religions. 'So Christ and his Apostles went about speaking day after day,' is a truer and more instructive thought than 'these things were formally set down for our instruction'. Nor does it really diminish the power of Scripture to describe it, as it appears to the eye of the critical student, as a collection of fragmentary and occasional pieces. For these fragments are living plants; the germ of eternal life is in them all; the least of all seeds, when compared in bulk with human literature, they have grown up into a tree, the shade of which covers the earth.

FROM THE ESSAY ON THE LAW AS THE STRENGTH OF SIN

'The strength of sin is the law.'—1 Cor. xv. 56.

In another sense than that in which the Apostle employs the words, 'the law is dead to us, and we to the law.' The lapse of ages has but deepened the chasm which separates Judaism from Christianity. Between us and them there is a gulf fixed, so that few are they who pass from them to us, nor do any go from us to them. The question remains, What application is it possible for us to make of that which has preceded? Is there anything in the world around standing in the same relation to us that the law did to the contemporaries of St. Paul?

One answer that might be given is, 'the Roman Catholic Church.' The experience of Luther seems indeed not unlike that struggle which St. Paul describes. But whatever resemblance may be found between Romanism and the ancient Jewish religion,—whether in their ceremonial or sacrificial character, or in the circumstance of their both resting on outward and visible institutions, and so limiting the worship of Spirit and truth,—it cannot be said that Romanism stands in the same relation to us individually that the law did to the Apostle St. Paul. The real parallels are more general, though less obvious. The law St. Paul describes as without us, but not in that sense in which an object of sense is without us; though without us it exercises an inward power;

it drives men to despair; it paralyses human nature; it causes evil by its very justice and holiness. It is like a barrier which we cannot pass; a chain wherewith a nation is bound together; a rule which is not adapted to human feelings, but which guides them into subjection to itself.

It has been already remarked that a general parallel to 'the law as the strength of sin' is to be found in that strange blending of good and evil, of truth and error, which is the condition of our earthly existence. But there seem also to be cases in which the parallel is yet closer; in which good is not only the accidental cause of evil, but the limiting principle which prevents man from working out to the uttermost his individual and spiritual nature. In some degree, for example, society may exercise the same tyranny over us, and its conventions be stumbling-blocks to us of the same kind as the law to the contemporaries of St. Paul; or, in another way, the thought of self and the remembrance of our past life may 'deceive and slay us.' As in the description of the seventh chapter of the Romans:—'It was I, and it was not I; and who can deliver me from the influence of education and the power of my former self?' Or faith and reason, reason and faith may seem mutually to limit each other, and to make the same opposition in speculation that the law and the flesh did to the Apostle in practice. Or, to seek the difficulty on a lower level, while fully assured of the truths of the Gospel, we may seem to be excluded from them by our mental or bodily constitution, which no influences of the Spirit or power of habit may be capable of changing.

I. The society even of a Christian country—and the same remark applies equally to a Church—is only to a certain extent based upon Christian prin-

ciple. It rests neither on the view that all mankind are evil, nor that they are all good, but on certain motives, supposed to be strong enough to bind mankind together; on institutions handed down from former generations; on tacit compacts between opposing parties and opinions. Every government must tolerate, and therefore must to a certain degree sanction, contending forms of faith. Even in reference to those more general principles of truth and justice which, in theory at least, equally belong to all religions, the government is limited by expediency, and seeks only to enforce them so far as is required for the preservation of society. Hence arises a necessary opposition between the moral principles of the individual and the political principles of a state. A good man may be sensitive for his faith, zealous for the honour of God, and for every moral and spiritual good; the statesman has to begin by considering the conditions of human society. Aristotle raises a famous question, whether the good citizen is the good man? We have rather to raise the question, whether the good man is the good citizen? If matters of state are to be determined by abstract principles of morality and religion,—if, for the want of such principles, whole nations are to be consigned to the vengeance of heaven,—if the rule is to be not 'my kingdom is not of this world', but, 'we ought to obey God rather than man'—there is nothing left but to supersede civil society, and found a religious one in its stead.

It is no imaginary spectre that we are raising, but one that acts powerfully on the minds of religious men. Is it not commonly said by many, that the government is unchristian, that the legislature is unchristian, that all governments and all legislatures are the enemies of Christ and His Church? Herein to them is the fixed evil of the world; not in vice, or

in war, or in injustice, or in falsehood; but simply in the fact that the constitution of their country conforms to the laws of human society. It is not necessary to suppose that they will succeed in carrying out their principles, or that a civilized nation will place its liberties in the keeping of a religious party. But, without succeeding, they do a great deal of harm to themselves and to the world. For they draw the mind away from the simple truths of the Gospel to manifestations of opinion and party spirit; they waste their own power to do good; some passing topic of theological controversy drains their life. We may not 'do evil that good may come', they say; and 'what is morally wrong cannot be politically right'; and with this misapplied 'syllogism of the conscience' they would make it impossible, in the mixed state of human affairs, to act at all, either for good or evil. He who seriously believes that not for our actual sins, but for some legislative measure of doubtful expediency, the wrath of God is hanging over his country, is in so unreal a state of mind as to be scarcely capable of discerning the real evils by which we are surrounded. The remedies of practical ills sink into insignificance compared with some point in which the interests of religion appear to be, but are not, concerned.

But it is not only in the political world that imaginary forms of evil present themselves, and we are haunted by ideas which can never be carried out in practice; the difficulty comes nearer home to most of us in our social life. If governments and nations appear unchristian, the appearance of society itself is in a certain point of view still more unchristian. Suppose a person acquainted with the real state of the world in which we live and move, and neither morosely depreciating nor unduly exalting human nature, to turn to the image of the Christian Church

in the New Testament, how great would the difference appear! How would the blessing of poverty contrast with the real, even the moral advantages of wealth! the family of love, with distinctions of ranks! the spiritual, almost supernatural, society of the first Christians, with our world of fashion, of business, of pleasure! the community of goods, with our meagre charity to others! the prohibition of going to law before the heathen, with our endless litigation before judges of all religions! the cross of Christ, with our ordinary life! How little does the world in which we live seem to be designed for the tabernacle of immortal souls! How large a portion of mankind, even in a civilized country, appears to be sacrificed to the rest, and to be without the means of moral and religious improvement! How fixed, and steadfast, and regular do dealings of money and business appear! how transient and passing are religious objects! Then, again, consider how society, sometimes in self-defence, sets a false stamp on good and evil; as in the excessive punishment of the errors of women, compared with Christ's conduct to the woman who was a sinner. Or when men are acknowledged to be in the sight of God equal, how strange it seems that one should heap up money for another, and be dependent on him for his daily life. Susceptible minds, attaching themselves, some to one point, some to another, may carry such reflections very far, until society itself appears evil, and they desire some primitive patriarchal mode of life. They are tired of conventionalities; they want, as they say, to make the Gospel a reality; to place all men on a religious, social, and political equality. In this, as in the last case, 'they are kicking against the pricks'; what they want is a society which has not the very elements of a social state; they do not perceive that the cause of

the evil is human nature itself, which will not cohere without mixed motives and received forms and distinctions, and that Providence has been pleased to rest the world on a firmer basis than is supplied by the fleeting emotions of philanthropy, viz. self-interest. We are not, indeed, to sit with our arms folded, and acquiesce in human evil. But we must separate the accidents from the essence of this evil: questions of taste, things indifferent, or customary, or necessary, from the weightier matters of oppression, falsehood, vice. The ills of society are to be struggled against in such a manner as not to violate the conditions of society; the precepts of Scripture are to be applied, but not without distinctions of times and countries; Christian duties are to be enforced, but not identified with political principles. To see the world,—not as it ought to be, but as it is,—to be on a level with the circumstances in which God has placed them, to renounce the remote and impossible for what is possible and in their reach; above all, to begin within,—these are the limits which enthusiasts should set to their aspirations after social good. It is a weary thing to be all our life long warring against the elements, or, like the slaves of some eastern lord, using our hands in a work which can only be accomplished by levers and machines. The physician of society should aid nature instead of fighting against it; he must let the world alone as much as he can; to a certain degree, he will even accept things as they are, in the hope of bettering them.

II. Mere weakness of character will sometimes afford an illustration of the Apostle's words. If there are some whose days are 'bound each to each by natural piety', there are others on whom the same continuous power is exercised for evil as well as good; they are unable to throw off their former self; the

sins of their youth lie heavy on them; the influence of opinions which they have ceased to hold discolours their minds. Or it may be that their weakness takes a different form, viz. that of clinging to some favourite resolve, or of yielding to some fixed idea which gets dominion over them, and becomes the limit of all their ideas. A common instance of this may be found in the use made by many persons of conscience. Whatever they wish or fancy, whatever course of action they are led to by some influence obvious to others, though unobserved by themselves, immediately assumes the necessary and stereotyped form of the conscientious fulfilment of a duty. To every suggestion of what is right and reasonable, they reply only with the words—'their consciences will not allow it.' They do what they think right; they do not observe that they never seem to themselves to do otherwise. No voice of authority, no opinion of others, weighs with them when put in the scale against the dictates of what they term conscience. As they get older, their narrow ideas of right acquire a greater tenacity; the world is going on, and they are as they were. A deadening influence lies on their moral nature, the peculiarity of which is, that, like the law, it assumes the appearance of good, differing from the law only in being unconscious. Conscience, one may say, putting their own character into the form of a truth or commandment, 'has deceived and slain them.'

Another form of conscience yet more closely resembles the principle described in the seventh chapter of the Romans. There is a state in which man is powerless to act, and is, nevertheless, clairvoyant of all the good and evil of his own nature. He places the good and evil principle before him, and is ever oscillating between them. He traces the labyrinth

of conflicting principles in the world, and is yet further perplexed and entangled. He is sensitive to every breath of feeling, and incapable of the performance of any duty. Or take another example: it sometimes happens that the remembrance of past suffering, or the consciousness of sin, may so weigh a man down as fairly to paralyse his moral power. He is distracted between what he is and what he was; old habits and vices, and the new character which is being fashioned in him. Sometimes the balance seems to hang equal; he feels the earnest wish and desire to do rightly, but cannot hope to find pleasure and satisfaction in a good life; he desires heartily to repent, but can never think it possible that God should forgive. 'It is I, and it is not I, but sin that dwelleth in me.' 'I have, and have never ceased to have, the wish for better things, even amid haunts of infamy and vice.' In such language, even now, though with less fervour than in 'the first spiritual chaos of the affections', does the soul cry out to God—'O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?'

III. There is some danger of speculative difficulties presenting the same hindrance and stumbling-block to our own generation, that the law is described as doing to the contemporaries of St. Paul. As the law was holy, just, and good, so many of these difficulties are true, and have real grounds: all of them, except in cases where they spring from hatred and opposition to the Gospel, are at least innocent. And yet, by undermining received opinions, by increasing vanity and egotism, instead of strengthening the will and fixing the principles, their promulgation may become a temporary source of evil; so that, in the words of the Apostle, it may be said of them that, taking occasion by the truth, they deceive and slay men.

What then? is the law sin? is honest inquiry wrong? God forbid! it is we ourselves who are incapable of receiving the results of inquiry; who will not believe unless we see; who demand a proof that we cannot have; who begin with appeals to authority, and tradition, and consequences, and, when dissatisfied with these, imagine that there is no other foundation on which life can repose but the loose and sandy structure of our individual opinions. Persons often load their belief in the hope of strengthening it; they escape doubt by assuming certainty. Or they believe 'under an hypothesis'; their worldly interests lead them to acquiesce; their higher intellectual convictions rebel. Opinions, hardly won from study and experience, are found to be at variance with early education, or natural temperament. Opposite tendencies grow together in the mind; appearing and reappearing at intervals. Life becomes a patchwork of new and old cloth, or like a garment which changes colour in the sun.

It is true that the generation to which we belong has difficulties to contend with, perhaps greater than those of any former age; and certainly different from them. Some of those difficulties arise out of the opposition of reason and faith; the critical inquiries of which the Old and New Testament have been the subject are a trouble to many; the circumstance that, while the Bible is the word of life for all men, such inquiries are open only to the few, increases the irritation. The habit of mind which has been formed in the study of Greek or Roman history may be warned off the sacred territory, but cannot really be prevented from trespassing: still more impossible is it to keep the level of knowledge at one point in Germany, at another in England. Geology, ethnology, historical and metaphysical criticism, assail in

succession not the Scriptures themselves, but notions and beliefs which in the minds of many good men are bound up with them. The eternal strain to keep theology where it is while the world is going on, specious reconcilements, political or ecclesiastical exigencies, recent attempts to revive the past, and the reaction to which they have given birth, the contrast that everywhere arises of old and new, all add to the confusion. Probably no other age has been to the same extent the subject of cross and contradictory influences. What can be more unlike than the tone of sermons and of newspapers? or the ideas of men on art, politics, and religion, now, and half a generation ago? The thoughts of a few original minds, like wedges, pierce into all received and conventional opinions and are almost equally removed from either. The destruction of 'shams,' that is, the realization of things as they are amid all the conventions of thought and speech and action, is also an element of unsettlement. The excess of self-reflection, again, is not favourable to strength or simplicity of character. Every one seems to be employed in decomposing the world, human nature, and himself. The discovery is made that good and evil are mixed in a far more subtle way than at first sight would have appeared possible; and that even extremes of both meet in the same person. The mere analysis of moral and religious truth, the fact that we know the origin of many things which the last generation received on authority, is held by some to destroy their sacredness. Lastly, there are those who feel that all the doubts of sceptics put together fall short of that great doubt which has insinuated itself into their minds, from the contemplation of mankind—saying one thing and doing another.

It is foolish to lament over these things; it would

be still more foolish to denounce them. They are the mental trials of the age and country in which God has placed us. If they seem at times to exercise a weakening or unsettling influence, may we not hope that increasing love of truth, deeper knowledge of ourselves and other men, will, in the end, simplify and not perplex the path of life? We may leave off in mature years where we began in youth, and receive not only the kingdom of God, but the world also, as 'little children'. The analysis of moral and religious truth may correct its errors without destroying its obligations. Experience of the illusions of religious feeling at a particular time should lead us to place religion on a foundation which is independent of feeling. Because the Scripture is no longer held to be a book of geology or ethnology, or a supernatural revelation of historical facts, it will not cease to be the law of our lives, exercising an influence over us, different in kind from the ideas of philosophical systems, or the aspirations of poetry or romance. Because the world (of which we are a part) is hypocritical and deceitful, and individuals go about dissecting their neighbours' motives and lives, that is a reason for cherishing a simple and manly temper of mind, which does not love men the less because it knows human nature more; which pierces the secrets of the heart, not by any process of anatomy, but by the light of an eye from which the mists of selfishness are dispersed.

IV. The relation in which science stands to us may seem to bear but a remote resemblance to that in which the law stood to the Apostle St. Paul. Yet the analogy is not fanciful, but real. Traces of physical laws are discernible everywhere in the world around us; in ourselves also, whose souls are knit together with our bodies, whose bodies are a part of

the material creation. It seems as if nature came so close to us as to leave no room for the motion of our will: instead of the inexhaustible grace of God enabling us to say, in the language of the Apostle, 'I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me,' we become more and more the slaves of our own physical constitution. Our state is growing like that of a person whose mind is over-sensitive to the nervous emotions of his own bodily frame. And as the self-consciousness becomes stronger and the contrast between faith and experience more vivid, there arises a conflict between the spirit and the flesh, nature and grace, not unlike that of which the Apostle speaks. No one who, instead of hanging to the past, will look forward to the future, can expect that natural science should stand in the same attitude towards revelation fifty years hence as at present. The faith of mankind varies from age to age; it is weaker, or it may be stronger, at one time than at another. But that which never varies or turns aside, which is always going on and cannot be driven back, is knowledge based on the sure ground of observation and experiment, the regular progress of which is itself matter of observation. The stage at which the few have arrived is already far in advance of the many, and if there were nothing remaining to be discovered, still the diffusion of the knowledge that we have, without new addition, would exert a great influence on religious and social life. Still greater is the indirect influence which science exercises through the medium of the arts. In one century a single invention has changed the face of Europe: three or four such inventions might produce a gulf between us and the future far greater than the interval which separates ancient from modern civilization. Doubtless God has provided a way that the thought of Him

should not be banished from the hearts of men. And habit, and opinion, and prescription may 'last our time,' and many motives may conspire to keep our minds off the coming change. But if ever our present knowledge of geology, of languages, of the races and religions of mankind, of the human frame itself, shall be regarded as the starting-point of a goal which has been almost reached, supposing too the progress of science to be accompanied by a corresponding development of the mechanical arts, we can hardly anticipate, from what we already see, the new relation that will then arise between reason and faith. Perhaps the very opposition between them may have died away. At any rate experience shows that religion is not stationary when all other things are moving onward.

Changes of this kind pass gradually over the world; the mind of man is not suddenly thrown into a state for which it is unprepared. No one has more doubts than he can carry; the way of life is not found to stop and come to an end in the midst of a volcano, or on the edge of a precipice. Dangers occur, not from the disclosure of any new, or hitherto unobserved, facts, for which, as for all other blessings, we have reason to be thankful to God; but from our concealment or denial of them, from the belief that we can make them other than they are; from the fancy that some *a priori* notion, some undefined word, some intensity of personal conviction, is the weapon with which they are to be met. New facts, whether bearing on Scripture, or on religion generally, or on morality, are sure to win their way; the tide refuses to recede at any man's bidding. And there are not wanting signs that the increase of secular knowledge is beginning to be met by a corresponding progress in religious ideas. Controversies are dying out; the

lines of party are fading into one another; niceties of doctrine are laid aside. The opinions respecting the inspiration of Scripture, which are held in the present day by good and able men, are not those of fifty years ago; a change may be observed on many points, a reserve on still more. Formulas of reconciliation have sprung up: 'the Bible is not a book of science,' 'the inspired writers were not taught supernaturally what they could have learned from ordinary sources,' resting-places in the argument at which travellers are the more ready to halt, because they do not perceive that they are only temporary. For there is no real resting-place but in the entire faith, that all true knowledge is a revelation of the will of God. In the case of the poor and suffering, we often teach resignation to the accidents of life; it is not less plainly a duty of religious men, to submit to the progress of knowledge. That is a new kind of resignation, in which many Christians have to school themselves. When the difficulty may seem, in anticipation, to be greatest, they will find, with the Apostle, that there is a way out: 'The truth has made them free.'

ESSAY ON PREDESTINATION AND FREE WILL

THE difficulty of necessity and free will is not peculiar to Christianity. It enters into all religions at a certain stage of their progress; it reappears in philosophy and is a question not only of speculation but of life. Wherever man touches nature, wherever the stream of thought which flows within meets and comes into conflict with scientific laws, reflecting on the actions of an individual in relation to his antecedents, considering the balance of human actions in many individuals; when we pass into the wider field of history, and trace the influence of circumstances on the course of events, the sequence of nations and states of society, the physical causes that lie behind all; in the region of philosophy, as we follow the order of human thoughts, and observe the seeming freedom and real limitation of ideas and systems; lastly in that higher world of which religion speaks to us, when we conceive man as a finite being, who has the witness in himself of his own dependence on God, whom theology too has made the subject of many theories of grace, new forms appear of that famous controversy which the last century discussed under the name of necessity and free will.

I shall at present pursue no further the train of reflections which are thus suggested. My first object is to clear the way for the consideration of the subject within the limits of Scripture. Some preliminary obstacles offer themselves, arising out of the opposi-

tion which the human mind everywhere admits in the statement of this question. These will be first examined. We may afterwards return to the modern aspects of the contradiction and of the reconcilement.

§ 1.

In the relations of God and man, good and evil, finite and infinite, there is much that must ever be mysterious. Nor can any one exaggerate the weakness and feebleness of the human mind in the attempt to seek for such knowledge. But although we acknowledge the feebleness of man's brain and the vastness of the subject, we should also draw a distinction between the original difficulty of our own ignorance, and the puzzles and embarrassments which false philosophy or false theology have introduced. The impotence of our faculties is not a reason for acquiescing in a metaphysical fiction. Philosophy has no right to veil herself in mystery at the point where she is lost in a confusion of words. That we know little is the real mystery; not that we are caught in dilemmas or surrounded by contradictions. These contradictions are involved in the slightest as well as in the most serious of our actions, which is a proof of their really trifling nature. They confuse the mind but not things. To trace the steps by which mere abstractions have acquired this perplexing and constraining power, though it cannot meet the original defect, yet may perhaps assist us to understand the misunderstanding, and to regard the question of predestination and free will in a simpler and more natural light.

A subject which claims to be raised above the rules and requirements of logic must give a reason for the exemption, and must itself furnish some other test of

truth to which it is ready to conform. The reason is that logic is inapplicable to the discussion of a question which begins with a contradiction in terms: it can only work out the opposite aspects or principles of such a question on one side or the other, but is inadequate to that more comprehensive conception of the subject which embraces both. We often speak of language as an imperfect instrument for the expression of thought. Logic is even more imperfect; it is wanting in the plastic and multiform character of language, yet deceives us by the appearance of a straight rule and necessary principle. Questions respecting the relation of God and man, necessity and free will, the finite and the infinite—perhaps every question which has two opposite poles of fact and idea—are beyond the sphere of its art. But if not logic, some other test must be found of our theories or reasonings, on these and the like metaphysical subjects. This can only be their agreement with facts, which we shall the more readily admit if the new form of expression or statement of them be a real assistance to our powers of thought and action.

The difficulties raised respecting necessity and free will partake, for the most part, of the same nature as the old fallacies respecting motion and space of Zeno and the Eleatics, and have their 'solvitur ambulando' as well. This is the answer of Bishop Butler, who aims only at a practical solution. But as it is no use to say to the lame man, 'rise up and walk,' without a crutch or helping hand, so it is no use to offer these practical solutions to a mind already entangled in speculative perplexities. It retorts upon you—'I cannot walk: if my outward actions seem like other men's; if I do not throw myself from a precipice, or take away the life of another under the fatal influence of the doctrine of necessity, yet the course of thought

within me is different. I look upon the world with other eyes, and, slowly and gradually, differences in thought must beget differences also in action.' But if the mind, which is bound by this chain, could be shown that it was a slave only to its own abstract ideas,—that it was below where it ought to be above them,—that, considering all the many minds of men as one mind, it could trace the fiction,—this world of abstractions would gradually disappear, and not merely in a Christian, but in a philosophical sense, it would receive the kingdom of Heaven as a little child, seeking rather for some new figure under which conflicting notions might be represented, than remaining in suspense between them. It may be as surprising to a future generation that the nineteenth century should have been under the influence of the illusion of necessity and free will, or that it should have proposed the law of contradiction as an ultimate test of truth, as it is to ourselves that former ages have been subjected to the fictions of essence, substance, and the like.

The notion that no idea can be composed of two contradictory conceptions seems to arise out of the analogy of the sensible world. It would be an absurdity to suppose that an object should be white and black at the same time; that a captive should be in chains and not in chains at the same time, and so on. But there is no absurdity in supposing that the mental analysis even of a matter of fact or an outward object should involve us in contradictions. Objects, considered in their most abstract point of view, may be said to contain a positive and a negative element: everything is and is not; is in itself, and is not, in relation to other things. Our conceptions of motion, of becoming, or of beginning, in like manner involve a contradiction. The old puzzles of the Eleatics are

merely an exemplification of the same difficulty. There are objections, it has been said, against a vacuum, objections against a plenum, though we need not add, with the writer who makes the remark, 'Yet one of these must be true.' How a new substance can be formed by chemical combination out of two other substances may seem also to involve a contradiction, *e.g.* water is and is not oxygen and hydrogen. Life, in like manner, has been defined as a state in which every end is a means, and every means an end. And if we turn to any moral or political subject we are perpetually coming across different and opposing lines of argument, and constantly in danger of passing from one sphere to another; of applying, for example, moral or theological principles to politics, and political priniciples to theology. Men form to themselves first one system, then many, as they term them different, but in reality opposite to each other. Just as that nebulous mass, out of which the heavens have been imagined to be formed, at last, with its circling motion, subsides into rings, and embodies the 'stars moving in their courses', so also in the world of mind there are so many different orbits which never cross or touch each other, and yet which must be conceived of as the colours of the rainbow, the result of a single natural phenomenon.

It is at first sight strange that some of these contradictions should seem so trivial to us, while others assume the appearance of a high mystery. In physics or mathematics we scarcely think of them, though speculative minds may sometimes be led by them to seek for higher expressions, or to embrace both sides of the contradiction in some conception of flux or transition, reciprocal action, process by antagonism, the Hegelian vibration of moments, or the like. In

common life we acquiesce in the contradiction almost unconsciously, merely remarking on the difference of men's views, or the possibility of saying something on either side of a question. But in religion the difficulty appears of greater importance, partly from our being much more under the influence of language in theology than in subjects which we can at once bring to the test of fact and experiment, and partly also from our being more subject to our own natural constitution, which leads us to one or the other horn of the dilemma, instead of placing us between or above both. As in heathen times it was natural to think of extraordinary phenomena, such as thunder and lightning, as the work of gods rather than as arising from physical causes, so it is still to the religious mind to consider the bewilderments and entanglements which it has itself made as a proof of the unsearchableness of the Divine nature.

The immovableness of these abstractions from within will further incline us to consider the metaphysical contradiction of necessity and free will in the only rational way; that is, 'historically.' To say that we have ideas of fate or freedom which are innate, is to assume what is at once disproved by a reference to history. In the East and West, in India and in Greece, in Christian as well as heathen times, whenever men have been sufficiently enlightened to form a distinct conception of a single Divine power or overruling law, the question arises, How is the individual related to this law? The first answer to this question is Pantheism; in which the individual, dropping his proper qualities, abstracts himself into an invisible being, indistinguishable from the Divine. God overpowers man; the inner life absorbs the outer; the ideal world is too much for this. The second answer, which the East has also given to this

question, is Fatalism; in which, without abstraction, the individual identifies himself, soul and body, in deed as well as thought, with the Divine will. The first is the religion of contemplation; the second, of action. Only in the last, as the world itself alters, the sense of the overruling power weakens; and faith in the Divine will, as in Mahometan countries at the present day, shows itself, not in a fanatical energy, but in passive compliance and resignation.

The gradual emergence of the opposition is more clearly traceable in the Old Testament Scriptures or in Greek poetry or philosophy. The Israelites are distinguished from all other Eastern nations—certainly from all contemporary with their early history—by their distinct recognition of the unity and personality of God. God, who is the Creator and Lord of the whole earth, is also in a peculiar sense the God of the Jewish people whom He deals with according to His own good pleasure, which is also a law of truth and right. He is not so much the Author of good as the Author of all things, without whom nothing either good or evil can happen; not only the permitter of evil, but in a few instances, in the excess of His power, the cause of it also. With this universal attribute He combines another, 'the Lord our God, who brought us out of the land of bondage.' The people have one heart and one soul with which they worship God and have dealings with Him. Only a few individuals among them, as Moses or Joshua, draw near separately to Him. In the earliest ages they do not pray each one for himself. There is a great difference in this respect between the relation of man to God which is expressed in the Psalms and in the Pentateuch. In the later Psalms, certainly, and even in some of those ascribed to David, there is an immediate personal intercourse

between God and His servants. At length in the books of Job and Ecclesiastes, the human spirit begins to strive with God, and to ask not only, how can man be just before God? but also, how can God be justified to man? There was a time when the thought of this could never have entered into their minds; in which they were only, as children with a father, doing evil, and punished, and returning once more to the arms of His wisdom and goodness. The childhood of their nation passed away, and the remembrance of what God had done for their fathers was forgotten; religion became the religion of individuals, of Simeon and Anna, of Joseph and Mary. On the one hand, there was the proud claim of those who said, 'We have Abraham to our Father'; on the other hand, the regretful feeling 'that God was casting off Israel,' which St. Paul in the manner of the Old Testament rebukes with the words, 'Who art thou, O man?' and 'We are the clay, and He the potter.'

We may briefly trace the progress of a parallel struggle in Grecian mythology. It presents itself, however, in another form, beginning with the Fates weaving the web of life, or the Furies pursuing the guilty, and ending in the pure abstraction of necessity or nature. Many changes of feeling may be observed between the earlier and later of these two extremes. The Fate of poetry is not like that of philosophy, the chain by which the world is held together; but an ever-living power or curse—sometimes just, sometimes arbitrary,—specially punishing impiety towards the Gods or violations of nature. In Homer it represents also a determination already fixed, or an ill irremediable by man; in one aspect it is the folly which 'leaves no place for repentance'. In Pindar it receives a nobler form, 'Law the king of all.' In

the tragedians it has a peculiar interest, giving a kind of measured and regular movement to the whole action of the play. The consciousness that man is not his own master had deepened in the course of ages; there had grown up in the mind a sentiment of overruling law. It was this half-religious, half-philosophical feeling, which Greek tragedy embodied; whence it derived not only dramatic irony or contrast of the real and seeming, but also its characteristic feature—repose. The same reflective tone is observable in the 'Epic' historian of the Persian war; who delights to tell, not (like a modern narrator) of the necessary connexion of causes and effects, but of effects without causes, due only to the will of Heaven. A sadder note is heard at intervals of the feebleness and nothingness of man; *πᾶν ἐστιν ἄνθρωπος συμφορή*. In Thucydides (who was separated from Herodotus by an interval of about twenty years) the sadness remains, but the religious element has vanished. Man is no longer in the toils of destiny, but he is still feeble and helpless. Fortune and human enterprise divide the empire of life.

Such conceptions of fate belong to Paganism, and have little in common with that higher idea of Divine predestination of which the New Testament speaks. The Fate of Greek philosophy is different from either. The earlier schools expressed their sense of an all-pervading law in rude, mythological figures. In time this passed away, and the conceptions of chance, of nature, and necessity became matters of philosophical inquiry. By the Sophists first the question was discussed, whether man is the cause of his own actions; the mode in which they treated of the subject being to identify the good with the voluntary, and the evil with the involuntary. It is this phase of the question which is alone considered by Aristotle.

In the chain of the Stoics the doctrine has arrived at a further stage, in which human action has become a part of the course of the world. How the free will of man was to be reconciled either with Divine power, or Divine foreknowledge, was a difficulty which pressed upon the Stoical philosopher equally as upon the metaphysicians of the last century; and was met by various devices, such as that of the confatalism of Chrysippus, which may be described as a sort of identity of fate and freedom, or of an action and its conditions.

Our inquiry has been thus far confined to an attempt to show, first, that the question of predestination cannot be considered according to the common rules of logic; secondly, that the contradictions which are involved in this question are of the same kind as many other contrasts of ideas; and, thirdly, that the modern conception of necessity was the growth of ages, whether its true origin is to be sought in the Scriptures, or in the Greek philosophy, or both. If only we could throw ourselves back to a prior state of the world, and know no other modes of thought than those which existed in the infancy of the human mind, the opposition would cease to have any meaning for us; and thus the further reflection is suggested, that if ever we become fully conscious that the words which we use respecting it are words only, it will again become unmeaning. Historically we know when it arose, and whence it came. Already we are able to consider the subject in a simpler way, whether presented to us (1) in connexion with the statements of Scripture, or (2) as a subject of theology and philosophy.

§ 2.

Two kinds of predestination may be distinguished in the writings of St. Paul, as well as in some parts of the Old Testament. First, the predestination of nations; secondly, of individuals. The former of these may be said to flow out of the latter, God choosing at once the patriarchs and their descendants. As the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews expresses it, 'By faith Abraham offered up Isaac; and therefore sprang there of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of heaven in multitude.' The life of the patriarchs was the type or shadow of the history of their posterity, for evil as well as good. 'Simeon and Levi are brethren; instruments of cruelty are in their habitations; Joseph is a goodly bough': Moab and Ammon are children of whoredom; Ishmael is a wild man, and so on. There is also the feeling that whatever extraordinary thing happens in Jewish history is God's doing, not of works nor even of faith, but of grace and choice; 'He took David from the sheep-folds, and set him over His people Israel.' So that a double principle is discernible: first, absolute election; and, secondly, the fulfilment of the promises made to the fathers, or the visitation of their sins upon the children.

The notion of freedom is essentially connected with that of individuality. No one is truly free who has not that inner circle of thoughts and actions in which he is wholly himself and independent of the will of others. A slave, for example, may be in this sense free, even while in the service of his lord; constraint can apply only to his outward acts, not to his inward nature. But if, in the language of Aristotle, he were a natural slave, whose life seemed to himself defective and imperfect, who had no

thoughts or feelings of his own, but only instincts and impulses, we could no more call him free than a domestic animal which attaches itself to a master. So, in that stage of society in which the State is all in all, the idea of the individual has a feeble existence. In the language of philosophy the whole is free, and the parts are determined by the whole. So the theocracy of the Old Testament seems to swallow up its members. The Jewish commonwealth is governed by God himself; this of itself interferes with the personal relation in which He stands to the individuals who compose it. Through the law only, in the congregation, at the great feasts, through their common ancestors, the people draw near to God; they do not venture to think severally of their separate and independent connexion with Him. They stand or fall together; they go astray or return to Him as one man. It is this which makes so much of their history directly applicable to the struggle of Christian life. Religion, which to the believer in Christ is an individual principle, is with them a national one.

The idea of a chosen people passes from the Old Testament into the New. As the Jews had been predestined in the one, so it appeared to the Apostle St. Paul that the Gentiles were predestined in the other. In the Old Testament he observed two sorts of predestination; first, that more general one, in which all who were circumcised were partakers of the privilege—which was applicable to all Israelites as the children of Abraham; secondly, the more particular one, in reference to which he says, 'All are not Israel who are of Israel.' To the eye of faith 'all Israel were saved'; and yet within Israel there was another Israel chosen in a more special sense. The analogy of this double predestination the Apostle

transfers to the Christian society. All alike were holy, even those of whom he speaks in the strongest terms of reprobation. The Church, like Israel of old, presents to the Apostle's mind the conception of a definite body, consisting of those who are sealed by baptism and have received 'the first fruits of the Spirit'. They are elect according to the foreknowledge or predisposition of God; sealed by God unto the day of redemption; a peculiar people, a royal priesthood, taken alike from Jews and Gentiles. The Apostle speaks of their election as of some external fact. The elect of God have an offence among them not even named among the Gentiles, they abuse the gifts of the Spirit, they partake in the idol's temple, they profane the body and blood of Christ. And yet, as the Israelites of old, they bear on their foreheads the mark that they are God's people, and are described as 'chosen saints', 'sanctified in Christ Jesus.'

Again, the Apostle argues respecting Israel itself, 'Hath God cast off his people whom he foreknew?' or rather, whom He before appointed. They are in the position of their fathers when they sinned against Him. If we read their history we shall see, that what happened to them in old times is happening to them now; and yet in the Old Testament as well as the New the overruling design was not their condemnation but their salvation—'God concluded all under sin that he might have mercy upon all.' They stumbled and rose again then; they will stumble and rise again now. Their predestination from the beginning is a proof that they cannot be finally cast off; beloved as they have been for their fathers' sakes, and the children of so many promises. There is a providence which, in spite of all contrary appearance, in spite of the acceptance of the Gentiles, or rather

so much the more in consequence of it, makes all things work together for good to the chosen people.

In this alternation of hopes and fears, in which hope finally prevails over fear, the Apostle speaks in the strongest language of the right of God to do what He will with His own; if any doctrine could be established by particular passages of Scripture, Calvinism would rest immovable on the ninth chapter of the Romans. It seemed to him no more unjust that God should reject than that He should accept the Israelites; if, at that present time He cut them short in righteousness, and narrowed the circle of election, He had done the same with the patriarchs. He had said of old, 'Jacob have I loved, and Esau have I hated:' and this preference, as the Apostle observes, was shown before either could have committed actual sin. In the same spirit He says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.' And to Pharaoh, 'For this cause have I raised thee up.' Human nature, it is true, rebels at this, and says, 'Why does he yet find fault?' To which the Apostle only replies, 'Shall the thing formed say unto him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay?' Some of the expressions which have become the most objectionable watchwords of predestinarian theology, such as 'vessels of wrath and vessels of mercy', are in fact taken from the same passage in the Epistle to the Romans.

It is answered by the opponents of Calvinism, that the Apostle is here speaking not of individual but of national predestination. From the teaching of the Old Testament respecting the election of the Jewish people we can infer nothing respecting the Divine economy about persons. To which in turn it may be

replied, that if we admit the principle that the free choice of nations is not inconsistent with Divine justice, we cannot refuse to admit the free choice of persons also. A little more or a little less of the doctrine cannot make it more or less reconcilable with the perfect justice of God. Nor can we argue that the election of nations is a part of the Old Testament dispensation, which has no place in the New; because the Apostle speaks of election according to the purpose of God as a principle which was at that time being manifested in the acceptance of the Gentiles.

Yet the distinction is a sound one if stated a little differently, that is to say, if we consider that the predestination of Christians is only the continuance of the Old Testament in the New. It is the feeling of a religious Israelite respecting his race; this the Apostle enlarges to comprehend the Gentiles. As the temporal Israel becomes the spiritual Israel, the chosen people are transfigured into the elect. Why this is so is only a part of the more general question, 'why the New Testament was given through the Old?' It was natural it should be so given; humanly speaking, it could not have been otherwise. The Gospel would have been unmeaning, if it had been 'tossed into the world' separated from all human antecedents; if the heaven of its clearness had been beyond the breath of every human feeling. Neither is there any more untruthfulness in St. Paul's requiring us to recognize the goodness of God in the election of some and the rejection of others, than in humility or any act of devotion. The untruth lies not in the devout feeling, but in the logical statement. When we humble ourselves before God, we may know, as a matter of common sense, that we are not worse than others; but this, however true ('Father, I thank thee I am not as other men'), is not the temper in

which we kneel before Him. So in these passages, St. Paul is speaking, not from a general consideration of the Divine nature, but with the heart and feelings of an Israelite. Could the question have been brought before him in another form,—could he have been asked whether God, according to His own pleasure, chose out individual souls, so that some could not fail of being saved while others were necessarily lost,—could he have been asked whether Christ died for all or for the chosen few,—whether, in short, God was sincere in His offer of salvation,—can we doubt that to such suggestions he would have replied in his own words, 'God forbid! for how shall God judge the world?'

It has been said that the great error in the treatment of this subject consists in taking chap. ix. separated from chaps. x. xi. We may say more generally, in taking parts of Scripture without the whole, or in interpreting either apart from history and experience. In considering the question of predestination, we must not forget that at least one-half of Scripture tells not of what God does, but of what man ought to do; not of grace and pardon only, but of holiness. If, in speaking of election, St. Paul seems at times to use language which implies the irrespective election of the Jews as a nation; yet, on the other hand, what immediately follows shows us that conditions were understood throughout, and that, although we may not challenge the right of God to do what He would with His own, yet that in all His dealings with them the dispensation was but the effect of their conduct. And although the Apostle is speaking chiefly of national predestination, with respect to which the election of God is asserted by him in the most unconditional terms; yet, as if he were already anticipating the application of his

doctrine to the individual, he speaks of human causes for the rejection of Israel; 'because they sought not righteousness by the way of faith'; 'because they stumble at the rock of offence.' God accepted and rejected Israel of His own good pleasure; and yet it was by their own fault. How are we to reconcile these conflicting statements? They do not need reconciliation; they are but the two opposite expressions of a religious mind, which says at one moment, 'Let me try to do right', and at another, 'God alone can make me do right'. The two feelings may involve a logical contradiction, and yet exist together in fact and in the religious experience of mankind.

In the Old Testament the only election of individuals is that of the great leaders or chiefs, who are identified with the nation. But in the New Testament, where religion has become a personal and individual matter, it follows that election must also be of persons. The Jewish nation knew, or seemed to know, one fact, that they were the chosen people. They saw, also, eminent men raised up by the hand of God to be the deliverers of His servants. It is not in this 'historical' way that the Christian becomes conscious of his individual election. From within, not from without, he is made aware of the purpose of God respecting himself. Living in close and intimate union with God, having the mind of the Spirit and knowing the things of the Spirit, he begins to consider with St. Paul, 'When it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, to reveal his Son in me.' His whole life seems a sort of miracle to him; supernatural, and beyond other men's in the gifts of grace which he has received. If he asks himself, 'Whence was this to me?' he finds no other answer but that God gave them 'because he had a

favour unto him.' He recalls the hour of his conversion, when, in a moment, he was changed from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God. Or, perhaps, the dealings of God with him have been insensible, yet not the less real; like a child, he cannot remember the time when he first began to trust the love of his parent. How can he separate himself from that love or refuse to believe that He who began the good work will also accomplish it unto the end? At which step in the ladder of God's mercy will he stop? 'Whom he did foreknow, them he did predestinate; whom he did predestinate, them he also called; whom he called, them he justified; whom he justified, them he also glorified.'

A religious mind feels the difference between saying, 'God chose me; I cannot tell why; not for any good that I have done; and I am persuaded that He will keep me unto the end'; and saying, 'God chooses men quite irrespective of their actions, and predestines them to eternal salvation'; and yet more, if we add the other half of the doctrine, 'God refuses men quite irrespective of their actions, and they become reprobates, predestined to everlasting damnation.' Could we be willing to return to that stage of the doctrine which St. Paul taught, without comparing contradictory statements or drawing out logical conclusions,—could we be content to rest our belief, as some of the greatest, even of Calvinistic divines have done, on fact and experience, theology would be no longer at variance with morality.

'Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God that worketh in you both to do and to will of His good pleasure', is the language of Scripture, adjusting the opposite aspects of this question. The Arminian would say, 'Work out your own salvation'; the Calvinist, 'God worketh in

you both to do and to will of His good pleasure.' However contradictory it may sound, the Scripture unites both; work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure.

§ 3.

I. We have been considering the question thus far within the limits of Scripture. But it has also a wider range. The primary relations of the will of man to the will of God are independent of the Christian revelation. Natural religion, that is to say, the Greek seeking after wisdom, the Indian wandering in the expanse of his own dreamlike consciousness, the Jew repeating to himself that he is Abraham's seed; each in their several ways at different stages of the world's history have asked the question, 'How is the freedom of the human will consistent with the infinity and omnipotence of God?' These attributes admit of a further analysis into the power of God and the knowledge of God. And hence arises a second form of the inquiry, 'How is the freedom of the human will reconcilable with Divine omniscience or foreknowledge?' To which the Christian system adds a third question, 'How is the freedom of the human will reconcilable with that more immediate presence of God in the soul which is termed by theologians Divine grace?'

(1) God is everywhere; man is nowhere. Infinity exists continuously in every point of time; it fills every particle of space. Or rather, these very ideas of time and space are figures of speech, for they have a 'here' and a 'there', a future and a past—which no effort of human imagination can transcend. But in God there is no future and no past, neither 'here nor there'; He is all and in all. Where, then, is room

for man? in what open place is he permitted to live and move and have his being?

God is the cause of all things; without Him nothing is made that is made. He is in history, in nature, in the heart of man. The world itself is the work of His power; the least particulars of human life are ordained by Him. 'Are not two sparrows sold for one farthing, and yet your heavenly Father feedeth them'; and 'the hairs of your head are all numbered'. Is there any point at which this Divine causality can stop? at which the empire of law ceases? at which the human will is set free?

The answer is the fact; not the fact of consciousness as it is sometimes termed, that we are free agents, which it is impossible to see or verify; but the visible tangible fact that we have a place in the order of nature, and walk about on the earth, and are ourselves causes drawing effects after them. Does any advocate of freedom mean more than this? Or any believer in necessity less? No one can deny of himself the restrictions which he observes to be true of others; nor can any one doubt that there exists in others the same consciousness of freedom and responsibility which he has himself. But if so, all these things are as they were before; we need not differ about the unseen foundation whether of necessity or free will, spirit or body, mind or matter, upon which the edifice of human life is to be reared. Just as the theory of the ideality of matter leaves the world where it was—they do not build houses in the air who imagine Bishop Berkeley to have dissolved the solid elements into sensations of the mind—so the doctrine of necessity or predestination leaves morality and religion unassailed, unless it intrude itself as a motive on the sphere of human action.

It is remarkable that the belief in predestination,

both in modern and in ancient times, among Mahometans as well as Christians, has been the animating principle of nations and bodies of men, equally, perhaps more than of individuals. It is characteristic of certain countries, and has often arisen from sympathy in a common cause. Yet it cannot be said to have been without a personal influence also. It has led to a view of religion in which man has been too much depressed to form a true conception of God Himself. For it is not to be supposed that the lower we sink human nature in the scale of being, the higher we raise the Author of being; worthy notions of God imply worthy notions of man also.

'God is infinite.' But in what sense? Am I to conceive a space without limit, such as I behold in the immeasurable ether, and apply this viewless form to the thought of the Almighty? Any one will admit that here would be a figure of speech. Yet few of us free our notions of infinity from the imagery of place. It is this association which gives them their positive, exclusive character. But conceive of infinity as mere negation, denying of God the limits which are imposed upon finite beings, meaning only that God is not a man or comprehensible by man, without any suggestion of universal space, and the exclusiveness disappears; there is room for the creature side by side with the Creator. Or again, press the idea of the infinite to its utmost extent, till it is alone in the universe, or rather is the universe itself, in this heaven of abstraction, nevertheless, a cloud begins to appear; a limitation casts its shadow over the formless void. Infinite is finite because it is infinite. That is to say, because infinity includes all things, it is incapable of creating what is external to itself. Deny infinity in this sense, and the being to

whom it is attributed receives a new power; God is greater by being finite than by being infinite. Proceeding in the same train of thought, we may observe that the word finite is the symbol, to our own minds as to the Greek, of strength and reality and truth. It cannot be these which we intend to deny of the Divine Being. Lastly, when we have freed our minds from associations of place and from those other solemn associations which naturally occur to us from its application to the Almighty, are we sure that we intend anything more by the 'Infinite' than mere vacancy, the 'indefinite', the word 'not'?

It is useful to point out the ambiguities and perplexities of such terms. Logic is not to puzzle us with inferences about words which she clothes in mystery; at any rate, before moving a step she should explain their meaning. She must admit that the infinite overreaches itself in denying the existence of the finite, and that there are some 'limitations', such as the impossibility of evil or falsehood, which are of the essence of the Divine nature. She must inquire whether it be conceivable to reach a further infinite, in which the opposition to the finite is denied, which may be a worthier image of the Divine Being. She must acknowledge that negative ideas, while they have often a kind of solemnity and mystery, are the shallowest and most trifling of all our ideas.

So far the will may be free unless we persist in an idea of the Divine which logic and not reason erroneously requires, and which is the negative not only of freedom but of all other existence but its own. More serious consequences may seem to flow from the attribute of omnipotence. For if God is the Author of all things, must it not be as a mode of Divine operation that man acts? We can get no further

than a doctrine of emanation or derivation. Again, we are caught unwittingly in the toils of an 'illogical' logic. For why should we assume that because God is omnipotent He cannot make beings independent of Himself? A figure of speech is not generally a good argument; but in this instance it is a sufficient one, what is needed being not an answer but only an image or mode of conception. (For in theology and philosophy it constantly happens that while logic is working out antinomies, language fails to supply an expression of the intermediate truth.) The carpenter makes a chair, which exists detached from its maker; the mechanician constructs a watch, which is wound up and goes by the action of a spring or lever; he can frame yet more complex instruments, in which power is treasured up for other men to use. The greater the skill of the artificer the more perfect and independent the work. Shall we say of God only that He is unable to separate His creations from Himself? That man can produce works of imagination which live for ages after he is committed to the dust; nay, that in the way of nature he can bring into existence another being endowed with life and consciousness to perpetuate his name? But that God cannot remove a little space to contemplate His works? He must needs be present in all their movements, according to the antiquated error of natural philosophers, 'that no body can act where it is not.'

(2) Yet although the freedom of the will may be consistent with the infinity and omnipotence of God, when rightly understood and separated from logical consequences, it may be thought to be really interfered with by the Divine omniscience. 'God knows all things; our thoughts are His before they are our own; what I am doing at this moment was certainly

foreseen by Him; what He certainly foresaw yesterday, or a thousand years ago, or from everlasting, how can I avoid doing at this time? To-day He sees the future course of my life. Can I make or unmake what is already within the circle of His knowledge? The imperfect judgement of my fellow-creatures gives me no disquietude—they may condemn me, and I may reverse their opinion. But the fact that the unerring judgement of God has foreseen my doom renders me alike indifferent to good and evil.'

What shall we say to this? First, that the distinction between Divine and human judgements is only partially true. For as God sees with absolute unerringness, so a wise man who is acquainted with the character and circumstances of others may foretell and assure their future life with a great degree of certainty. He may perceive intuitively their strength and weakness, and prophesy their success or failure. Now, here it is observable, that the fact of our knowing the probable course of action which another will pursue has nothing to do with the action itself. It does not exercise the smallest constraint on him; it does not produce the slightest feeling of constraint. Imagine ourselves acquainted with the habits of some animal; as we open the door of the enclosure in which it is kept, we know that it will run up to or away from us; it will show signs of pleasure or irritation. No one supposes that its actions, whatever they are, depend on our knowledge of them. Let us take another example, which is at the other end of the scale of freedom and intelligence. Conceive a veteran statesman casting his eye over the map of Europe, and foretelling the parts which nations or individuals would take in some coming struggle, who thinks the events when they come to

pass are the consequences of the prediction? Every one is able to distinguish the causes of the events from the knowledge which foretells them.

There are degrees in human knowledge or foreknowledge proceeding from the lowest probability, through increasing certainty, up to absolute demonstration. But as faint presumptions do not affect the future, nor great probability, so neither does scientific demonstration. Many natural laws cannot be known more certainly than they are; but we do not therefore confuse the fact with our knowledge of the fact. The time of the rising of the sun, or of the ebb and flow of the tide, are foretold and acted upon without the least hesitation. Yet no one has imagined that these or any other natural phenomena are affected by our previous calculations about them.

Why, then, should we impose on ourselves the illusion that the unerring certainty of Divine knowledge is a limit or shackle on human actions? The foreknowledge which we possess ourselves in no way produces the facts which we foresee; the circumstance that we foresee them in distant time has no more to do with them than if we saw them in distant space. So, once more, we return from the dominion of ideas and trains of speculative consequences to rest in experience. God sits upon the circle of the heavens, present, past, and future in a figure open before Him, and sees the inhabitants of the earth like grasshoppers, coming and going, to and fro, doing or not doing their appointed work: His knowledge of them is not the cause of their actions. So might we ourselves look down upon some wide prospect without disturbing the peaceful toils of the villagers who are beneath. They do not slacken or hasten their business because we are looking at them. In like manner God may look upon mankind without there-

by interfering with the human will or influencing in any degree the actions of men.

(3) But the difficulty with which Christianity surrounds, or rather seems to surround us, winds yet closer; it rests also on the Christian consciousness. The doctrine of grace may be expressed in the language of St. Paul: 'I can do nothing as of myself, but my sufficiency is of God'; that which is truly self, which is peculiarly self, is yet in another point of view not self but God. He who has sought most earnestly to fulfil the will of God refers his efforts to something beyond himself; he is humble and simple, seeming to fear that he will lose the good that he has, when he makes it his own.

This is the mind of Christ which is formally expressed in theology by theories of grace. Theories of grace have commonly started from the transgression of Adam and the corruption of human nature in his posterity. Into the origin of sin it is not necessary for us to inquire; we may limit ourselves to the fact. All men are very far gone from original righteousness, they can only return to God by His grace preventing them; that is to say, anticipating and co-operating with the motions of their will. (1) God wills that some should be saved, whom He elects without reference to their deserts; (2) God wills that some should be saved, and implants in them the mind of salvation; (3) God calls all men, but chooses some out of those whom He calls; (4) God chooses all alike, and shows no preference to any; (5) God calls all men, even in the heathen world, and some hear His voice, not knowing whom they obey. Such are the possible gradations of the question of election. In the first of them grace is a specific quality distinct from holiness or moral virtue; in the second it is identical with holiness and moral virtue, according to

a narrow conception of them which denies their existence in those who have not received a Divine call; in the third an attempt is made to reconcile justice to all men with favour to some; in the fourth the justice of God extends equally to all Christian men; in the fifth we pass the boundaries of the Christian world and expression is given to the thought of the Apostle, 'Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons, but that in every nation he that feareth God is accepted of him.'

All these theories of grace affect at various points the freedom of the will, the first seeming wholly to deny it, while all the others attempt some real or apparent reconcilement of morality and religion. The fourth and fifth meet the difficulties arising out of our ideas of the justice of God, but fall into others derived from experience and fact. Can we say that all Christians, nominal and real, nay, that the most degraded persons among the heathen, are equally the subjects of Divine grace? Then grace is something unintelligible; it is a word only, to which there is no corresponding idea. Again, how upon any of these theories is grace distinguishable from the better consciousness of the individual himself? Can any one pretend to say where grace ends and the movement of the will begins? Did any one ever recognize in himself those lines of demarcation of which theology sometimes speaks?

These are difficulties in which we are involved by 'oppositions of knowledge falsely so called'. The answer to them is simple—a return to fact and nature. When, instead of reading our own hearts, we seek, in accordance with a preconceived theory, to determine the proportions of the divine and human —to distinguish grace and virtue, the word of God and man—we know not where we are, the difficulty

becomes insuperable, we have involved ourselves in artificial meshes, and are bound hand and foot. But when we look by the light of conscience and Scripture on the facts of human nature, the difficulty of itself disappears. No one doubts that he is capable of choosing between good and evil, and that in making this choice he may be supported, if he will, by a power more than earthly. The movement of that Divine power is not independent of the movement of his own will, but coincident and identical with it. Grace and virtue, conscience and the Spirit of God, are not different from each other, but in harmony. If no man can do what is right without the aid of the Spirit, then every one who does what is right has the aid of the Spirit.

Part of the difficulty originates in the fact that the Scripture regards Christian truth from a Divine aspect, 'God working in you,' while ordinary language, even among religious men in modern times, deals rather with human states or feelings. Philosophy has a third way of speaking which is different from either. Two or more sets of words and ideas are used which gradually acquire a seemingly distinct meaning; at last comes the question—in what relation they stand to one another? The Epistles speak of grace and faith at the same time that heathen moralists told of virtue and wisdom, and the two streams of language have flowed on without uniting even at our own day. The question arises, first, whether grace is anything more than the objective name of faith and love; and again, whether these two latter are capable of being distinguished from virtue and truth? Is that which St. Paul called faith absolutely different from that which Seneca termed virtue or morality? Is not virtue, *πρὸς θεόν*, faith? Is faith anything without virtue? But if

so, they are not opposed at all, or opposed only as part and whole. Christianity is not the negative of the religions of nature or the heathen; it includes and purifies them.

Instead, then, of arranging in a sort of theological diagram the relations of the human will to Divine grace, we deny the possibility of separating them. In various degrees, in many ways, more or less consciously in different cases, the Spirit of God is working in the soul of man. It is an erroneous mode of speaking, according to which the free agency of man is represented as in conflict with the Divine will. For the freedom of man in the higher sense is the grace of God; and in the lower sense (of mere choice) is not inconsistent with it. The real opposition is not between freedom and predestination, which are imperfect and in some degree misleading expressions of the same truth, but between good and evil.

II. Passing out of the sphere of religion, we have now to examine the question of free agency within the narrower limits of the mind itself. It will confirm the line of argument hitherto taken, if it be found that here too we are subject to the illusions of language and the oppositions of logic.

(1) Every effect has a cause; every cause an effect. The drop of rain, the ray of light does not descend at random on the earth. In the natural world though we are far from understanding all the causes of phenomena, we are certain from that part which we know, of their existence in that part which we do not know. In the human mind we perceive the action of many physical causes; we are therefore led to infer, that only our ignorance of physiology prevents our perceiving the absolute interdependence of body and soul. So indissolubly are cause and effect bound together, that there is a mental impossi-

bility in conceiving them apart. Where, then in the endless chain of causes and effect can the human will be inserted, or how is the insertion of the will, as one cause out of many, consistent with the absolute freedom which we ascribe to it?

The author of the *Critic of pure Reason* is willing to accept such a statement as has been just made, and yet believes himself to have found out of time and space, independent of the laws of cause and effect, a transcendental freedom. Our separate acts are determined by previous causes; our whole life is a continuous 'effect', yet in spite of this mechanical sequence, freedom is the overruling law which gives the form to human action. It is not necessary to analyse the steps by which Kant arrived at this paradoxical conclusion. Only by adjusting the glass so as to exclude from the sight everything but the perplexities of previous philosophers, can we conceive how a great intellect could have been led to imagine the idea of a freedom from which the notion of time is abstracted, of which nevertheless we are conscious in time. For what is that freedom which does not apply to our individual acts, hardly even to our lives as a whole, like a point which has neither length nor breadth, wanting both continuity and succession?

Scepticism proceeds by a different path in reference to our ideas of cause and effect; it challenges their validity, it denies the necessity of the connexion, or even doubts the ideas themselves. There was a time when the world was startled out of its propriety at this verbal puzzle, and half believed itself a sceptic. Now we know that no innovation in the use of words or in forms of thought can make any impression on solid facts. Nature and religion, and human life remain the same, even to one who entirely renounces the common conceptions of cause and effect.

The sceptic of the last century, instead of attempting to invalidate the connexion of fact which we express by the terms cause and effect, should rather have attacked language as 'unequal to the subtlety of nature'. Facts must be described in some way, and therefore words must be used, but always in philosophy with a latent consciousness of their inadequacy and imperfection. The very phrase, 'cause and effect,' has a direct influence in disguising from us the complexity of causes and effects. It is too abstract to answer to anything in the concrete. It tends to isolate in idea some one antecedent or condition from all the rest. And the relation which we deem invariable is really a most various one. Its apparent necessity is only the necessity of relative terms. Every cause has an effect, in the same sense that every father has a son. But while in the latter case the relation is always the same, the manifold application of the terms, cause and effect, to the most different phenomena has led to an ambiguity in their use. Our first impression is, that a cause is one thing and an effect another, but soon we find them doubling up, or melting into one. The circulation of the blood is not the cause of life, in the same sense that a blow with the hammer may be the cause of death; nor is virtue the cause of happiness, in precisely the same sense that the circulation of the blood is the cause of life. Everywhere, as we ascend in the scale of creation, from mechanics to chemistry, from chemistry to physiology and human action, the relative notion is more difficult and subtle, the cause becoming inextricably involved with the effect, and the effect with the cause, 'every means being an end, and every end a means.'

Hence, no one who examines our ideas of cause and effect will believe that they impose any limit on

the will; they are an imperfect mode in which the mind imagines the sequence of nature or moral actions; being no generalization from experience, but a play of words only. The chain which we are wearing is loose, and when shaken will drop off. External circumstances are not the cause of which the will is the effect; neither is the will the cause of which circumstances are the effect. But the phenomenon intended to be described by the words 'cause and effect' is itself the will, whose motions are analysed in language borrowed from physical nature.

The same explanation applies to another formula: 'the strongest motive.' The will of every man is said to be only determined by the strongest motive: what is this but another imaginary analysis of the will itself? For the motive is a part of the will, and the strongest motive is nothing more than the motive which I choose. Nor is it true as a fact that we are always thus determined. For the greater proportion of human actions have no distinct motives; the mind does not stand like the schoolmen's ass, pondering between opposite alternatives. Mind and will, and the sequence of cause and effect, and the force of motives, are different ways of speaking of the same mental phenomena.

So readily are we deceived by language, so easily do we fall under the power of imaginary reasonings. The author of the *Novum Organum* has put men upon their guard against the illusions of words in the study of the natural sciences. It is true that many distinctions may be drawn between the knowledge of nature, the facts of which are for the most part visible and tangible, and morality and religion, which run up into the unseen. But is it therefore to be supposed that language, which is the source of half the exploded fallacies of chemistry and physiology,

is an adequate or exact expression of moral and spiritual truths? It is probable that its analysis of human nature is really as erring and inaccurate as its description of physical phenomena, though the error may be more difficult of detection. Those 'inexact natures' or substances of which Bacon speaks exist in moral philosophy as in physics; their names are not heat, moisture, form, matter and the like, but necessity, free will, predestination, grace, motive, cause, which rest upon nothing and yet become the foundation-stones of many systems. Logic, too, has its parallels, and conjugates, and differences of kind, which in life and reality are only differences of degree, and remote inferences lending an apparent weight to the principle on which they really drag, which spread themselves over every field of thought and are hardly corrected by their inconsistency with the commonest facts.

III. Difficulties of this class belong to the last generation rather than to the present; they are seldom discussed now by philosophical writers. Philosophy in our own age is occupied in another way. Her foundation is experience, which alone she interrogates respecting the limits of human action. How far is man a free agent? is the question still before us. But it is to be considered from without rather than from within, as it appears to others or ourselves in the case of others, and not with reference to our internal consciousness of our own actions.

The conclusions of philosophers would have met with more favour at the hands of preachers and moralists, had they confined themselves to the fact. Indeed, they would have been irresistible, like the conclusions of natural science, for who can resist evidence that any one may verify for himself? But the taint of language has clung to them; the im-

perfect expression of manifest truths has greatly hindered the general acceptance of them even among the most educated. It was not understood that those who spoke of necessity meant nothing which was really inconsistent with free will; when they assumed a power of calculating human actions, it was not perceived that all of us are every day guilty of this imaginary impiety. The words, character, habit, force of circumstances, temperament and constitution imply all that is really involved in the idea that human action is subject to uniform laws. Neither is it to be denied that expressions have been used equally repugnant to fact and morality; instead of regularity, and order, and law, which convey a beneficent idea, necessity has been set up as a constraining power tending to destroy, if not really destroying, the accountability of man. History, too, has received an impress of fatalism, which has doubtless affected our estimate of the good and evil of the agents who have been regarded as not really responsible for actions which the march of events forced upon them.

According to a common way of considering this subject, the domain of necessity is extending every day, and liberty is already confined to a small territory not yet reclaimed by scientific inquiry. Mind and body are in closer contact; there is increasing evidence of the interdependence of the mental and nervous powers. It is probable, or rather certain, that every act of the mind has a cause and effect in the body, that every act of the body has a cause and effect in the mind. Given the circumstances, parentage, education, temperament of each individual; we may calculate, with an approximation to accuracy, his probable course of life. Persons are engaged every day in making such observations; and whatever *uncertainty* there may be in the determination of the

future of any single individual, this uncertainty is eliminated when the inquiry is extended to many individuals or to a whole class. We have as good data for supposing that a fixed proportion of a million persons in a country will commit murder or theft as that a fixed proportion will die without reaching a particular age and of this or that disease under given circumstances. And it so happens that we have the power of testing this order or uniformity in the most trifling of human actions. Nor can we doubt that were it worth while to make an abstract of human life, arranging under heads the least minutiae of action, all that we say and do would be found to conform to numerical laws.

So, again, history is passing into the domain of philosophy. Nations, like individuals, are moulded by circumstances; in their first rise, and ever after in their course, they are dependent on country and climate, like plants or animals, embodying the qualities which have dropped upon them from surrounding influences in national temperament; in their later stages seeming to react upon these causes, and coming under a new kind of law, as the earth discloses its hidden treasures, or the genius of man calls forth into life and action the powers which are dormant in matter. Nature, which is, in other words, the aggregate of all these causes, stamps nations and societies, and creates in them a mind, that is to say, ideas of order, of religion, of conquest, which they maintain, often unimpaired by the changes in their physical condition. She infuses among the mass a few great intellects, according to some law unknown to us, to 'instrument this lower world'. Here is a new power which is partially separated from the former, and yet combines with it in national existence, like body and soul in the existence of man. Partly

isolated from their age and nation, partly also identified with them, it is a curious observation respecting great men that while they seem to have more play and freedom than others, in themselves they are often more enthralled, being haunted with the sense of a destiny which controls them. The 'heirs of all the ages' who have subjected nature to the dominion of science are also nature's subjects; the conquerors who have poured over the earth have only continued some wave or tendency in the history of the times which preceded them. From the thin vapour which first floated, as some believe, in the azure vault, up to that miracle of complexity which we call man, and again from man the individual to the whole human race, with its languages and religions, and other national characteristics, and backwards to the beginning of human history, in the works of mind too as well as in the material universe, there is not always development, but order, and uniformity, and law.

It is a matter of some importance in what way this connexion or order of nature is to be expressed. For although words cannot alter facts, the right use of them greatly affects the readiness with which facts are admitted or received. Now the world may be variously imagined as a vast machine, as an animal or living being, as a body endowed with a rational or divine soul. All these figures of speech, and the associations to which they give rise, have an insensible influence on our ideas. The representation of the world as a machine is a more favourite one, in modern times, than the representation of it as a living being; and with mechanism is associated the notion of necessity. Yet the machine is, after all, a mere barren unity, which gives no conception of the endless *fertility* of natural or of moral life. So, again, when

we speak of a 'soul of the world', there is no real resemblance to a human soul; there is no centre in which this mundane life or soul has its seat, no individuality such as characterizes the soul of man. But the use of the word invariably recalls thoughts of Pantheism:

'deum namque ire per omnes
terrasque tractusque maris, coelumque profundum.'

So the term 'law' carries with it an association, partly of compulsion, partly of that narrower and more circumscribed notion of law, in which it is applied to chemistry or mechanics. So again the word 'necessity' itself always has a suggestion of external force.

All such language has a degree of error, because it introduces some analogy which belongs to another sphere of thought. But when, laying aside language, we consider facts only, no appearance of external compulsion arises, whether in nature, or in history, or in life. The lowest, and therefore the simplest idea, that we are capable of forming of physical necessity, is of the stone falling to the ground. No one imagines human action to be necessary in any such sense as this. If this be our idea of necessity, the meaning of the term must be enlarged when it is applied to man. If any one speaks of human action as the result of necessary laws, to avoid misunderstanding, we may ask at the outset of the controversy, 'In what degree necessary?' And this brings us to an idea which is perhaps the readiest solution of the apparent perplexity—that of degrees of necessity. For, although it is true, that to the eye of a superior or divine being the actions of men would seem to be the subject of laws quite as much as the falling stone,

yet these laws are of a far higher or more delicate sort; we may figure them to ourselves truly, as allowing human nature play and room within certain limits, as regulating only and not constraining the freedom of its movements.

How degrees of necessity are possible may be illustrated as follows: The strongest or narrowest necessity which we ever see in experience is that of some very simple mechanical fact, such as is furnished by the law of attraction. A greater necessity than this is only an abstraction; as, for example, the necessity by which two and two make four, or the three angles of a triangle equal two right angles But any relation between objects which are seen is of a much feebler and less absolute kind; the strongest which we have ever observed is that of a smaller body to a larger. The physiology even of plants opens to our minds freer and nobler ideas of law. The tree with its fibres and sap, drawing its nourishment from many sources, light, air, moisture, earth, is a complex structure: rooted to one particular spot, no one would think of ascribing to it free agency, yet as little should we think of binding it fast in the chains of a merely mechanical necessity. Animal life partaking with man of locomotion is often termed free; its sphere is narrowed only by instinct; indeed the highest grade of irrational being can hardly be said, in point of freedom, to differ from the lowest type of the human species. And in man himself are many degrees of necessity or freedom, from the child who is subject to its instincts, or the drunkard who is the slave of his passions, up to the philosopher comprehending at a glance the wonders of heaven and earth, the freeman 'whom the truth makes free', or the Christian devoting himself to God, whose freedom *is* '*ob*edience to a law'; that law being 'the law

of the Spirit of life', as the Apostle expresses it; respecting which, nevertheless, according to another mode of speaking (so various is language on this subject), 'necessity is laid upon him.' And between these two extremes are many half freedoms, or imperfect necessities: one man is under the influence of habit, another of prejudice, a third is the creature of some superior will; of a fourth it is said, that it was 'impossible for him to act otherwise'; a fifth does by effort what to another is spontaneous; while in the case of all, allowance is made for education, temperament, and the like.

The idea of necessity has already begun to expand; it is no longer the negative of freedom, they almost touch. For freedom, too, is subject to limitation; the freedom of the human will is not the freedom of the infinite, but of the finite. It does not pretend to escape from the conditions of human life. No man in his senses imagines that he can fly into the air, or walk through the earth; he does not fancy that his limbs will move with the expedition of thought. He is aware that he has a less, or it may be a greater, power than others. He learns from experience to take his own measure. But this limited or measured freedom is another form of enlarged necessity. Beginning with an imaginary freedom, we may reduce it within the bounds of experience; beginning with an abstract necessity, we may accommodate it to the facts of human life.

Attention has been lately called to the phenomena (already noticed) of the uniformity of human actions. The observation of this uniformity has caused a sort of momentary disturbance in the moral ideas of some persons, who seem unable to get rid of the illusion, that nature compels a certain number of individuals to act in a particular way, for the sake of keeping up

the average. Their error is, that they confuse the law, which is only the expression of the fact, with the cause; it is as though they affirmed the universal to necessitate the particular. The same uniformity appears equally in matters of chance. Ten thousand throws of the dice, *ceteris paribus*, will give about the same number of twos, threes, sixes: what compulsion was there here? So ten thousand human lives will give a nearly equal number of forgeries, thefts, or other extraordinary actions. Neither is there compulsion here; it is the simple fact. It may be said, Why is the number uniform? In the first place, it is *not* uniform, that is to say, it is in our power to alter the proportions of crime by altering its circumstances. And this change of circumstances is not separable from the act of the legislator or private individual by which it may be accomplished, which is in turn suggested by other circumstances. The will or the intellect of man still holds its place as the centre of a moving world. But, secondly, the imaginary power of this uniform number affects no one in particular; it is not required that A, B, C, should commit a crime, or transmit an undirected letter, to enable us to fill up a tabular statement. The fact exhibited in the tabular statement is the result of all the movements of all the wills of the ten thousand persons who are made the subject of analysis.

It is possible to conceive great variations in such tables; it is possible, that is, to imagine, without any change of circumstances, a thousand persons executed in France during one year for political offences, and none the next. But the world in which this phenomenon was observed would be a very different sort of world from that in which we live. It would be a world in which 'nations, like individuals, went mad'; *in which* there was no habit, no custom; almost, we

may say, no social or political life. Men must be no longer different, and so compensating one another by their excellencies and deficiencies, but all in the same extreme; as if the waves of the sea in a storm instead of returning to their level were to remain on high. The mere statement of such a speculation is enough to prove its absurdity. And, perhaps, no better way could be found of disabusing the mind of the objections which appear to be entertained to the fact of the uniformity of human actions, than a distinct effort to imagine the disorder of the world which would arise out of the opposite principle.

But the advocate of free will may again return to the charge, with an appeal to consciousness. 'Your freedom,' he will say, 'is but half freedom, but I have that within which assures me of an absolute freedom, without which I should be deprived of what I call responsibility.' No man has seen facts of consciousness, and therefore it is at any rate fair that before they are received they shall be subjected to analysis. We may look at an outward object which is called a table; no one would in this case demand an examination into the human faculties before he admitted the existence of the table. But inward facts are of another sort; that they really exist, may admit of doubt; that they exist in the particular form attributed to them, or in any particular form, is a matter very difficult to prove. Nothing is easier than to insinuate a mere opinion, under the disguise of a fact of consciousness.

Consciousness tells, or seems to tell, of an absolute freedom; and this is supposed to be a sufficient witness of the existence of such a freedom. But does consciousness tell also of the conditions under which this freedom can be exercised? Does it remind us that we are finite beings? Does it present to one

his bodily, to another his mental constitution? Is it identical with self-knowledge? No one imagines this. To what then is it the witness? To a dim and unreal notion of freedom, which is as different from the actual fact as dreaming is from acting. No doubt the human mind has or seems to have a boundless power, as of thinking so also of willing. But this imaginary power, going as it does far beyond experience, varying too in youth and age, greatest often in idea when it is really least, cannot be adduced as a witness for what is inconsistent with experience.

The question, How is it possible for us to be finite beings, and yet to possess this consciousness of freedom which has no limit? may be partly answered by another question: How is it possible for us to acquire any ideas which transcend experience? The answer is, only, that the mind has the power of forming such ideas; it can conceive a beauty, goodness, truth, which has no existence on earth. The conception, however, is subject to this law, that the greater the idealization the less the individuality. In like manner that imperfect freedom which we enjoy as finite beings is magnified by us into an absolute idea of freedom, which seems to be infinite because it drops out of sight the limits with which nature in fact everywhere surrounds us; and also because it is the abstraction of self, of which we can never be deprived, and which we conceive to be acting still when all the conditions of action are removed.

Freedom is absolute in another sense, as the correlative of obligation. Men entertain some one, some another, idea of right, but all are bound to act according to that idea. The standard may be relative to their own circumstances, but the duty is *absolute*; and the power is also absolute of refusing

the evil and choosing the good, under any possible contingency. It is a matter (not only of consciousness but) of fact, that we have such a power, quite as much as the facts of statistics, to which it is sometimes opposed, or rather, to speak more correctly, is one of them. And when we make abstraction of this power, that is, when we think of it by itself, there arises also the conception of an absolute freedom.

So singularly is human nature constituted, looking from without on the actions of men as they are, witnessing inwardly to a higher law. 'You ought to do so; you have the power to do so,' is consistent with the fact, that in practice you fail to do so. It may be possible for us to unite both these aspects of human nature, yet experience seems to show that we commonly look first at one and then at the other. The inward vision tells us the law of duty and the will of God; the outward contemplation of ourselves and others shows the trials to which we are most subject. Any transposition of these two points of view is fatal to morality. For the proud man to say, 'I inherited pride from my ancestors'; or for the licentious man to say, 'It is in the blood'; for the weak man to say, 'I am weak, and will not strive'; for any to find the excuses of their vices in their physical temperament or external circumstances, is the corruption of their nature.

Yet this external aspect of human affairs has a moral use. It is a duty to look at the consequences of actions, as well as at actions themselves; the knowledge of our own temperament, or strength, or health, is a part also of the knowledge of self. We have need of the wise man's warning, about 'age which will not be defied' in our moral any more than in our physical constitution. In youth, also, there are many things outward and indifferent, which cannot

but exercise a moral influence on after life. Often opportunities of virtue have to be made, as well as virtuous efforts; there are forms of evil, too, against which we struggle in vain by mere exertions of the will. He who trusts only to a moral or religious impulse, is apt to have aspirations, which never realize themselves in action. His moral nature may be compared to a spirit without a body, fluttering about in the world, but unable to comprehend or grasp any good.

Yet more, in dealing with classes of men, we seem to find that we have greater power to shape their circumstances than immediately to affect their wills. The voice of the preacher passes into the air; the members of his congregation are like persons 'beholding their natural face in a glass'; they go their way, forgetting their own likeness. And often the result of a long life of ministerial work has been the conversion of two or three individuals. The power which is exerted in such a case may be compared to the unaided use of the hand, while mechanical appliances are neglected. Or to turn to another field of labour, in which the direct influence of Christianity has been hitherto small, may not the reason why the result of missions is often disappointing be found in the circumstance, that we have done little to improve the political or industrial state of those among whom our missionaries are sent? We have thought of the souls of men, and of the Spirit of God influencing them, in too naked a way; instead of attending to the complexity of human nature, and the manner in which God has ever revealed Himself in the history of mankind.

The great lesson, which Christians have to learn in the present day, is to know the world as it is; that is to say, to know themselves as they are; human

life as it is; nature as it is; history as it is. Such knowledge is also a power, to fulfil the will of God and to contribute to the happiness of man. It is a resting-place in speculation, and a new beginning in practice. Such knowledge is the true reconcilement of the opposition of necessity and free will. Not that spurious reconcilement which places necessity in one sphere of thought, freedom in another; nor that pride of freedom which is ready to take up arms against plain facts; nor yet that demonstration of necessity in which logic, equally careless of facts, has bound fast the intellect of man. The whole question, when freed from the illusions of language, is resolvable into experience. Imagination cannot conquer for us more than that degree of freedom which we truly have; the tyranny of science cannot impose upon us any law or limit to which we are not really subject; theology cannot alter the real relations of God and man. The facts of human nature and of Christianity remain the same, whether we describe them by the word 'necessity' or 'freedom', in the phraseology of Lord Bacon and Locke, or in that of Calvin and Augustine.

RICHARD BAXTER[1]

I have been young and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken.—Ps. xxxvii. 25.

A GREAT man, Richard Baxter, who died about two hundred years ago, towards the close of his life drew up a narrative of the errors into which upon reflection he seemed to himself to have fallen in the course of it. This is not the exact anniversary of his death, which took place on Dec. 8, 1691. But I may, perhaps, without impropriety, speak to you of him on this day. The lives of great and good men are the best sermons which we ever read or hear; and the preacher may do well sometimes to shield himself behind them, and so to speak with greater authority than his own words could fairly claim. It is probable that the name of Baxter has never been celebrated before within these walls; for he was the leader of the Nonconformists of his day; and it is not to be supposed that perfect justice was done him in a later generation any more than in his own by his opponents. But now that both he and they are gone to their account, we can think of them only as the servants of God who by some strange accident were parted from one another here, but have now entered into common rest and dwell together in His presence.

I propose in this sermon to do three things—First,

[1] *A sermon*, preached in Westminster Abbey, July 4, 1891.

I shall give a brief account of the life of this remarkable man; one of the greatest of Englishmen, not only of his own, but of any time. Secondly, I shall enumerate a few particulars remarked by him about himself in that singular review of his own errors and misconceptions to which I have already referred, and which may with truth be said to be unique in English literature. Thirdly, I shall ask you to consider how you or I or any of us may, in a humble way, either towards the end of life or in the middle of it, examine our own lives in a similar spirit and see ourselves as we truly are, not gilded by self-love or self-conceit, but as we appear in the sight of other men and women of sense and in the sight of God.

The life of Richard Baxter coincides with a long period of political trouble. He was born in the year 1615, and died about three years after the Revolution of 1688. Both he and his father, who was an excellent man, seem to have passed through the awakening of Puritanism. In 1641 we find him settled at Kidderminster, in which town he continued to minister, with some interruptions, for seventeen years. Wonderful stories are told of the effects of his preaching. It might be said of him that as the people of Nineveh repented at the preaching of Jonah, so did the people of Kidderminster at the preaching of Richard Baxter. Nor was he more occupied in preaching the Gospel to his own flock than in opposing the Anabaptists and other sectaries, including the soldiers of Cromwell's army, with inexhaustible energy and irresistible logic. He was on the side of the Parliament, but believed for a time that both he and they were loyal subjects of the king. Under the Commonwealth he was appointed chaplain to Cromwell, and seems to have spoken his mind to him with astonishing freedom about King Charles

the First. Neither of them liked or trusted the other.

After the Restoration, during the short period when it was the policy of the Court to conciliate the Nonconformists, he was offered the Bishopric of Hereford. The offer was declined. Baxter continued to struggle for peace and toleration until, on Aug. 22, 1662, the Nonconformist ministers were finally expelled by the Act of Uniformity. That was the greatest misfortune that has ever befallen this country, a misfortune which has never been retrieved. For it has made two nations of us instead of one, in politics, in religion, almost in our notion of right and wrong: it has arrayed one class of society permanently against another. And many of the political difficulties of our own time have their origin in the enmities caused by the rout of Aug. 22, 1662, called Black Bartholomew's Day, which Baxter vainly strove to avert.

When the policy of the Church and the Court could no longer be resisted, Baxter, who might have been Bishop of Hereford, thought only of retiring to his beloved Kidderminster. He was not permitted to do so. For the next twenty-six years his life was that of an exile in his own land and a prisoner for conscience sake. Often there must have come into his mind those words of St. Paul, which in a measure represented his own sufferings: 'In labours more abundant, . . . in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft.... In perils by mine own countrymen,... in perils in the city, . . . in perils among false brethren. . . . Besides that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.' He was also afflicted during nearly the whole of his life with painful and terrible disorders of the body, which had often to be endured in prison *and without* the necessary means of support. Yet

was this the time when the activity of his mind was greatest. He is said to have been the most voluminous of English divines. He published 168 volumes; and among them one book which, with the single exception of the *Pilgrim's Progress*, has had a wider diffusion and found a nearer way to the hearts of religious men in England than any other devotional writing, and may still be read for its style as well as for its high merits with a deep interest, *The Saints' Everlasting Rest*.

When we hear of such men and their labours, who combined the persevering industry of the great scholar with the moral force of a hero and a leader of mankind, we are apt to say, 'There were giants on the earth in those days.' It would be better to say, that they were the sons of God who fought not in their own strength—one man more than a thousand, for they endured as seeing Him who is invisible.

Yet in this life of suffering, in the prison, in the court of the oppressed, in the poor and mean abode, amid disease and all the ills which flesh is heir to, there was one star or bright spot which shed a ray upon his darkness. This was a lady of gentle birth and breeding who, when he was near fifty years of age and she little more than twenty, gave herself to God and to him. He had once thought that it was better for a minister to be unmarried; he might have added the reason given by St. Paul—because of the troubles of the times. But now he came to see that a lot might be possible for two joined in sweet society, which to a single person might have been death and despair only. We may be confident that to her no other life would have been acceptable. She lived after her marriage nineteen years. Her name was Margaret Charlton. Her husband wrote what he called the breviate of her life, from which and from

other sources an eloquent writer of the present day has drawn a portrait of her. She was one of those remarkable women who have effaced themselves that they might help and save others, who have found their lives in losing them. After mentioning that 'her strangely vivid wit' was celebrated by John Howe, the great Nonconformist divine, the writer to whom I have referred continues as follows: 'Timid, gentle, and reserved, and nursed amid all the luxuries of her age, her heart was the abode of affection so intense and of fortitude so enduring that her meek spirit, impatient of one selfish wish, progressively acquired all the heroism of benevolence, and seemed at length incapable of one selfish fear. In prison, in sickness, in every form of danger and fatigue, she was still with unabated cheerfulness at the side of her husband, prompting him to the discharge of every duty, calming the asperities of his temper, his associate in unnumbered acts of philanthropy, embellishing his humble home by the little arts with which a cultivated mind imparts its own gracefulness to the meanest dwelling-place; and during the nineteen years of their union joining with him in one unbroken strain of filial affiance to the divine mercy. Her tastes and habits had been moulded with a perfect conformity to his. He celebrates her catholic charity to the opponents of their religious opinions and her inflexible adherence to her own; her high esteem of the active and passive virtues of the Christian life, as contrasted with a barren orthodoxy; her noble disinterestedness, her skill in casuistry, her love of music and her medicinal arts.'

There is still one more fact in Richard Baxter's life which, even in the shortest account of him, ought not to be passed over in silence: his refusal to join *with the* Roman Catholics against the Church of

England, who had been his persecutors during the twenty years previous. When the crisis which preceded the Revolution of 1688 was approaching, the government of James the Second sought to enlist the Nonconformists in their interest by a promise of toleration in their struggle against the Church of England. Baxter, who had been recently imprisoned, refused to join this new league and covenant, and by his great influence with his brethren succeeded in detaching them from it. He had no thought of revenging himself on the clerical party for their persecution of him. And certainly no one ever conferred a greater benefit on the Church of England or on the country. For it is easy to see that, if James the Second could have carried with him the Dissenters, he could have settled things as he pleased. This was what Baxter by his statesmanlike insight foresaw, and was not disposed to gain advantages for Nonconformists at the cost of the destruction of the Church of England or the establishment of Popery. He was the same man who, when he was committed twenty years before to Clerkenwell gaol for some slight infringement of ecclesiastical law, at the same time obtained from King Charles the Second, through the influence of one of his disciples, the charter of the original Society for the Propagation of the Gospel.

And so this eminent servant of God passed to his rest. Considering his character and popularity, the extent of his writings, his genius and learning, he may be said to be the greatest of English theologians (or one of the greatest), as he has certainly been one of the most lasting influences on popular theology. He was not without faults, of which, we gather from his writings and also from the narrative to which I referred at first, too great pugnacity and con-

tentiousness were the most serious. In the days of his youth he was too fervid and vehement and inconsiderate. But we are now to hear of him from his own just judgment of himself. He left no descendants. The scholar may be interested to know that William Baxter, the contemporary of Bentley and the editor of Anacreon and Horace, was the son of Richard Baxter's brother.

Baxter wrote a voluminous autobiography, in which at the end of the first part is found the review of his own life which I am going to describe to you. Why is this passage so remarkable? Because it is one of the few theological writings in which the love of holiness and the love of truth seem altogether to take the place of ecclesiastical and party interests; because it gets rid of conventionalities into which we all of us so readily fall when writing of things which are beyond us; because it admits us behind the veil into the holy place of a good man's soul. Many persons have written about themselves, but no one has done so with the same calm judgment or the same breadth of charity towards all other men.

He looks back into the vista of the past and judges his own motives and actions with the impartiality of history. He sees more clearly his own errors and prejudices when he is at a distance from them, as we sometimes have a wider and truer view of the landscape when the sun is going down and the heat of the day is past. He tells us that in his youth he was very apt to start upon controversies in ignorance of the antipathies and enmities which were engendered by them; now he is disposed to ignore differences, and to think with Lord Bacon that 'it is a great benefit of Church peace and concord, when writing controversies is turned into books of practical devotion'. He has learned to doubt whether men can

be reasoned into their opinions. He does not venture to say anything of his opponents, because his testimony respecting them is hardly to be believed. His observation of the world has led him to doubt the value of professions of religion; he had once thought that all who could pray movingly were saints, but now he has more charity for many who are wanting in such gifts. He is not for narrowing the Church more than Christ himself alloweth; nor for robbing Him of any of His flock. He is not so much inclined to pass a peremptory sentence of damnation upon all who never heard of Christ, having much more reason, he says, than I knew of before to think that God's dealings with such are much unknown to us. His censures of Papists too differ much from what they were at first. For he is now assured that their misexpressions and misunderstandings of us, and our mistakings of them and inconvenient expression of our own opinions, has made the differences between Protestant and Catholic on many points, such as Justification, to seem much greater than they are, and that in some points there is no difference at all. The great and irreconcileable differences lie in their church tyranny and usurpations, in their corruptions and abasement of God's worship, and their befriending of ignorance and vice. Yet he doubts not that God hath many sanctified ones among them; and he cannot believe that God will ever cast a soul into hell that truly loveth Him. He is farther than ever from expecting unity and prosperity to the Church on earth; or that saints should dream of a kingdom of this world, or flatter themselves with hopes of a Golden Age, or reigning over the ungodly. The observation of God's dealing with the Church in every age, and His befooling of them who have dreamed of glorious times, as the Anabaptists, the

Fifth Monarchy Men, and others, confirms him in this. If he were among the Greeks, the Lutherans, the Independents, yea, even the Anabaptists, he would sometimes hold communion with them. 'I cannot be of their mind that think God will not accept him that prayeth by the Common Prayer, nor yet can I be of their mind that say the like of extempore prayers.'

One more example of his toleration shall be added which, considering the country and age in which he lived, is really wonderful: it goes back far into the history of the past. After speaking of the prodigious lies which had been told in his own age in the interests of religion, and the tendency to believe everything on the one side and nothing on the other, he continues: 'Therefore I confess that I give but halting credit to most histories that are written, not only against the Albigenses and Waldenses, but against most of the ancient heretics who have left us none of their own writings in which they speak for themselves; and I heartily lament that the historical writings of the ancient schismatics and heretics (as they were called) perished, and that partiality suffered them not to survive, that we might have had more light on the Church affairs of those times and been better able to judge between the Fathers and them. And as I am prone to think that few of them were so bad as their adversaries made them, so I am apt to think that such as the Novatians, whom their adversaries commend, were very good men and more godly than most Catholics, however mistaken in some one point.'

Two characteristics he notes of advancing years. First, he feels a decline of the zeal of his youth, for which he is half inclined to blame himself; he thinks that he is like a person travelling a way which he *hath often* gone, or casting up an account which

he hath often cast up, or playing upon an instrument which he hath often played upon. And no doubt there have been many whose religions, like their other affections, have in a manner withered when life was beginning to decay, and who by frequent repetitions have grown tired of religious exercises. But he also finds better reasons for this decline of devotional fervour. For he has learned to value things more truly as he grows older and to see them in a juster proportion. In his youth he was quickly past fundamentals, and was running up into a multitude of controversies, and greatly delighted with metaphysical and scholastic writings, but in later life he laid less stress upon those controversies and curiosities, and found less and less certainty in them. The subjective certainty of an opinion cannot go beyond the objective evidence for it; and he will not pretend to be more certain than he is. He strongly urges that religion should rest on the broadest foundations; on the Being of God rather than on a future state of rewards and punishments, on that state itself rather than on the endless duration of it; on the essentials of the Christian faith rather than on the meaning of particular texts or the canonicalness of some certain books. They must allow him to use to Christians the arguments by which alone a heathen can be touched, such as the being of a God and the necessity of holiness.

There are some things for which he believes that God may have forgiven him, but he cannot forgive himself, especially for very rash words or deeds by which he may have seemed injurious or less tender and kind than he should have been to near and dear relations, 'whose love,' he says, 'abundantly obliged me. When such are dead, though we never differed in point of interest or any grave matter, every pro-

voking word which I gave them maketh me almost irreconcileable to myself, and tells me how repentance brought some of old to pray to the dead whom they had wronged to forgive them in the passion of their soul.'

There is another confession which he makes true to the experience, not only of himself, but probably of most religious men. He says that as he grew old he is troubled not so much by the consciousness of past sins, but by the sensible want of the love of God shed abroad in the heart. This he conceives to be the top of all religion which gives value to all the rest because it alters and elevates the mind. He used to think such meditations tiresome, and that everybody knew God to be good and great, and heaven to be a blessed place, but now he would sooner read, hear, or meditate on such truths than on anything else.

One more extract which speaks to our own and to every other age of the Christian Church: 'I apprehend it,' he says, 'to be a matter of great necessity to imprint true Catholicism in the minds of Christians, it being a most lamentable thing to observe how few Christians in the world there be that fall not into one sect or the other, and wrong not the common interest of Christianity for the promotion of the interest of their sect. And how lamentably love is thereby destroyed, so that most men think they are not bound to love men as the members of Christ which are against their party. And if they can but get to be of a sect which they think to be the holiest or which is the largest, they think that they are sufficiently warranted to deny others to be God's Church, or at least to deny them Christian love and communion.'

So I have endeavoured to place before you, very *imperfectly*, a fragment or two of a great mind. He

was one who lived as well as preached, and whose life was his most powerful sermon to posterity, as well as to his own age. Some of his words speak to us heart to heart, and have a far-reaching meaning to the wants of our days; there are others which are not equally appropriate because the relations of the Church and of the world have become different, and the thoughts of men 'have widened with the process of the suns'. There have been controversies in our own day, not so virulent, but as widely diffused as in the days of the Commonwealth and of the Restoration; and must we not all of us admit that we have changed many of our religious opinions during the last fifty years? There are a few here present who can remember how forty years ago, or again rather more than sixty years, the panic about Popery spread through the country. There may have been some indirect benefit which arose from such a movement, but it can hardly be said to have conduced to Christian charity. Reflecting on the past, and remembering all the evils which for a century and more have been the result of this anti-Catholic bigotry, must we not apply to ourselves the censure which Christ passed on His disciples, 'Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of,' or perhaps on this as on some other great historical occasion ask the question 'Whether nations like individuals, may not go mad'? Or, once more, we may note a remarkable change of opinion in which many of us no longer agree with our former selves, when the results of historical criticism in their bearing on the Old and New Testament began to be made known in this country; and now that we are becoming familiar with them, will any one say that we ought not in some degree to alter our attitude towards such inquiries as light and knowledge increase, and not embark the religion of Christ in

such a hopeless and unmeaning controversy? 'While we wrangle here in the dark,' I am once more quoting Baxter—'while we wrangle here in the dark, we are dying and passing to the world which will decide all our controversies, and the safest passage is by peaceable holiness. It is a great source of calm and repose in our religious life always to turn from small things to great, from things far away to things near at hand, from the foolishness of controversy to the truths which are simple and eternal, from man to God.'

And now, leaving history and controversy and subjects which most of us only hear about at a distance, I will suppose a similar vein of reflection to be entertained by an elder person living not two hundred years ago, but a contemporary of our own, present in this Abbey here to-night. He too has something to say to us which is of interest to himself and to others. Now on the threshold of old age, he may be supposed to take a look backward over the sixty or seventy years which have passed, not in the great world, but within the limits of his own home. His religion is not derived from books, but comes to him from his experience of life.

First he has a deep sense of thankfulness to God for all His mercies. He may have had troubles and disappointments in life, but he acknowledges that all things have been ordered for the best. The days pass more quickly with him now than formerly and make less impression on him. He will soon be crossing the bar and going forth upon the ocean. He is not afraid of death, it seems natural to him; he is soon about to pass into the hands of God. He has many thoughts about the past which he does not communicate to others—about some persons in whom he has had a peculiar interest, about places in which *he has lived*, about words spoken to him in his youth

which have strangely imprinted themselves on his mind, about many things which no one living but himself can remember. He wonders how he ever escaped from the temptations of youth, and is sometimes inclined to think that the Providence which watches over children and drunken people must have had a special care of him. He may have been guilty too of some meannesses or sins which are concealed from his fellow-men; he is thankful that they are known to God only. He is not greatly troubled at the remembrance of them, if he have been delivered from them, but much more at the unprofitableness of his whole life.

Before he departs he has some things to say to his children or to his friends. He will tell them that he now sees this world in different proportions, and that what was once greatly valued by him now seems no longer of importance. The dreams of love and of ambition have fled away; he is no longer under the dominion of the hour. The disappointments which he has undergone no more affect him; he is inclined to think that they may have been for his good. He sees many things in his life which might have been better; opportunities lost which could never afterwards be by him recovered. He might have been wiser about health, or the education of his children, or his choice of friends, or the management of his business. He would like to warn younger persons against some of the mistakes which he had himself made. He would tell them that no man in later life rejoiced in the remembrance of a quarrel; and that the trifles of life, good temper, a gracious manner, trifles as they are thought, are among the most important elements of success. Above all he would exhort them to get rid of selfishness and self-conceit, which are the two greatest sources of human evil.

There are some reflections which would often occur to his own mind though he might not speak of them to others. A sharp thrill of pain might sometimes pierce his heart when he remembered any irremediable wrong of which he had been the author, or when he recalled any unkind word to a parent which he had hastily uttered, or any dishonourable conduct of which he had been guilty. He need not disclose his fault to men, but neither will he disguise it from himself; least of all, if he have repented of the sin and is no longer the servant of it, should his conscience be overpowered by the remembrance of it. For sin too, like sorrow, is healed by time; and he who is really delivered from its bondage need not fear lest God should create it anew in him that He may inflict punishment upon him. For in the sight of God we are what we are, not what we have been at some particular moment; nor yet what we are in some detail or in reference to some particular act, but what we are on the whole.

Once more, when a man is drawing towards the end, he will be apt to think of the blessings of friendship and of family life. He has done so little for others and received so much from them. The old days of his childhood come back to him: the memory of his father and mother and brothers and sisters, all in the house together, and the lessons and the games and the birthday feasts and rejoicings as in a picture crowd upon his thoughts. When we have grown old they are most of them taken before us; no one else can ever fill their place in our lives. Also there have been friends who have been like brothers and sisters to us; many of these too are gone and cannot be replaced. They have sympathized with our trials; they have inspired us with higher *thoughts*; they have spoken words which have been

for ever imprinted on our mind. They have taken trouble to do us good—sometimes a remark of one of them thrown out as if by accident, or a letter written at a critical time, may have saved us from a fatal mistake. They have cared for our interests more than for their own, they would have died for us. Such experiences of disinterested friendship many men have had; and we reflect upon them more as we are left more alone, and the world is withdrawing from us. Living or dead the true friend can never be forgotten by faithful and loyal hearts. And as the days become fewer, we think more of them as they once were in life—as they are now with God where we too soon shall be.

Yet once more, we may suppose the statesman, who is within a measurable distance of the end,

> 'When the hurlyburly 's done,
> When the battle 's lost and won,'

to make similar reflections on his own political life. Perhaps he will say in the words of one who ten years ago was so familiar a figure among us: 'In the past there are many things I condemn, many things that I deplore, but a man's life must be taken as a whole.' He will not look back to party triumphs or great displays of oratory with the satisfaction which he once felt in them. He will acknowledge that he has made endless mistakes, and will sometimes wish that he had been more independent of popular opinion. He has done little compared with what he once hoped to do. He will value most that part of his work which tended to promote justice, or to save life or to increase health, or to diffuse education, or to establish the foundation of peace between nations and classes. And in the words of one of the greatest of English statesmen, he will be

glad to be remembered with expressions of goodwill in the abode of those whose lot it is to labour and to earn their daily bread by the sweat of their brow.

Lastly, we may extend the spirit of the reflections of Richard Baxter to the religious difficulties of our own day. We may imagine an aged man who has lived through the last fifty or sixty years, and has been watching the movements which have agitated the Church from extreme to extreme and back again, each tendency seeming to have as great or even a greater reaction. He would see, as Baxter saw in his old age, that all other things come to an end, but that of the love of God and man there is no end. He would not raise questions about the rites of the Church, or the canonicity of the books of Scripture: these belong to criticism and ecclesiastical history, not to the spiritual life. He would seek for the permanent and essential only in the books of Scripture, in the lives of good men, in the religion of the world. To follow Christ, to speak the truth in love, to do to others as you would they should do to you, these are the eternal elements of religion which can never pass away, and he who lives in these lives in God.

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