

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php

ARTICLE VIII.

THE RECONSTRUCTION OF THEOLOGY.¹

BY THE REV. DAVID N. BEACH, D. D.

I. THE CAVEAT OF SCRIPTURE.

IMBEDDED in the heart of the canon of the Old Testament, and also in the heart of the canon of the New Testament, is, in each instance, a document which, had it been apprehended in its broad relation to the volume in which it stands, might have saved the world a great deal of trouble. The latter of these is the Epistle to the Romans. The former is the Book of Job. In the case of the Romans, all fairly intelligent Christians are tolerably familiar with its general outline; much more, such persons as are special students of the Bible. In the case of the Book of Job, comparatively few of those who are fairly intelligent in biblical knowledge have adequately grasped its drift; though biblical specialists need not to be instructed concerning it. Yet such is the perspective in which these two documents stand in relation to each Testament, that, even though specialists should be among my readers, I undertake a *résumé* for the purpose of making clear the point I have in mind.

I. *In the New Testament—Romans.*

The writer to the Romans, in the case of this Epistle, as not in any other of his numerous extant letters, addresses

¹ Summer School of Theology, Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio, July 17, 1895; Boston (Congregational) Ministers' Meeting, March 16, 1896; Minneapolis (Congregational) Ministers' Meeting, October 5, 12, 1896; Saturday Club, Minneapolis, November 21, 1896. The article, "Some Questions in Religion now Pressing," in *The New World* for December, 1894, should, if practicable, be read first.

persons whom, as a body, he has never seen, and sends the Epistle to a place which, apparently, he has, as yet, never visited. The Epistle, indeed, is the immediate outgrowth of another, addressed to acquaintances in a particular place, and one of the most personal and pointed of all his letters. The Christians in the mountains of Galatia had been, by reason of their very liveliness of imagination, and devotion to Christian service, duped into a misunderstanding of the spirit of Christianity; and, at once upon the Apostle's hearing of this, he throws off for them in great heat of feeling and of logic, that affirmation and defense of essential Christian principles, which, obscure though it is in some respects for the modern reader, owing to the circumstances of its composition and the peculiar methods of argument resorted to, is, nevertheless, the germ of the Epistle to the Romans. That being done, the Apostle presently, with very considerable elaboration, and with most special design, prepares that Epistle which is to go, indeed, to a church and community which he has not as yet visited, but which as located at the capital of the world, he apparently desires shall receive, in most clearly stated and argued form, his conception of the general philosophy and ethics of the Christian religion. I say "general philosophy and ethics," because the Epistle distinctly passes, at the end of chapter xi., from the philosophical to the ethical part. Scarcely one, indeed, of the Apostle's letters fails to contain an ethical section near its close; but the division is so marked in the Romans, and the ethical section is so finely based, so beautifully unfolded, and so thoroughly elaborated, that it constitutes very distinctly an ethical Part II., so to say, of the Epistle.

It is in the philosophical section of this letter that the Apostle raises that note of warning and of exhortation which should have served, coincidentally with a similar note in the Book of Job, to save the world from much of

that trouble through which it has passed. The assumption of the philosophical section is, that "the invisible things of God since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made." God, in other words, is self-manifesting. The order of the world shows him forth. The intelligent mind in not, at least to some degree, grasping the thought of him, is "without excuse." Nevertheless, not so has the world grasped God. The heathen world in particular has utterly perverted its thought of him, and its thought of life. This any Jew will admit. He will glory in the Apostle's trenchant characterization and condemnation of the Gentile peoples. However, the Apostle proceeds, the Jew who does this will, in its very doing, condemn himself. Not in precisely the same manner, not, possibly, to such excess, but in reality and in spirit the Jewish world has done the same thing. "Wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest dost practice the same things." This common failure of Jew and Gentile alike to apprehend and to follow God, the Apostle proceeds to set over against an effort on the part of God to recover the world, and especially to recover the Jewish portion of it.

The inquiry which this undertaking on God's part occasions the Apostle, concerns this primary question, What is the essential thing that God in this effort and self-revelation has been aiming at in the Jewish cult? The Apostle believes this essential thing to be, not what the superficially reflecting Jew might infer, the details that have unfolded themselves in connection with the Pentateuchal and other regulations, but a something which already appeared in germ, before laws were at all formulated, in the first great character of that people, the father of the faithful, Abraham himself. He "believed God, and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness." That is to say, however indispensable for the time, and educationally valuable, the

special Jewish training had been, its aim, as indicated from the beginning, was to develop a special attitude of mind, a saving quality in the soul, namely, "faith." How germinal, profound, incapable of adequate specific definition, and destined to indefinitely large unfoldings, this root idea had in mind in God's self-manifestation in the training of Israel, was, appears in those chapters of the Romans, the fifth to the eighth, in which faith, brought out into clear light in Jesus, is elaborated under several points of view. Justified by such faith we have peace with God. This is attained through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him faith opens the door to a grace of life, "wherein we stand," unequaled heretofore in God's training of the world.

This faith and grace are turned over in many lights, but especially in the light of a continual spiritual battle waging in every soul, of which the classical statement occurs in chapter vii. To will is present with every earnest soul, but how to perform that will is the great problem. A war is in one's members. It amounts to a fearful struggle between the life and death of one's spirit. Its figure is a Roman prisoner chained to a festering corpse. From this struggle, the Apostle thanks God, he and any man may be delivered through that faith and grace into which Jesus is able to bring all. Thence the Apostle passes to the psychology of this experience; to a movement of the Spirit of God within the soul; and to a wonderful account of how that present Spirit helps men's infirmities, and brings them more and more out into the light and into the power of God. Nor is this description psychological only. It is cosmical also. It relates itself to that groaning and travailing of the whole creation which has become the special study of the evolutionist in our time. Distinctly oblivious to that far future stage in the unfolding of scientific knowledge, the Apostle, nevertheless, as clearly prefigures it as the poetical Genesis story prefigures, though indeed vague-

ly and imperfectly, those stages of the creation which the evolutionist is now able to indicate so clearly. Nothing,—after this psychological and cosmical survey of the inner working of the Spirit of God through the touch of Jesus,—the Apostle profoundly affirms, is able to separate the soul that is responsive to God from his great love.

However, this glorious survey is, by itself, quite too simple and easy. The Apostle perceives this. He acknowledges straightway the difficulties in the case. What is to happen to the Jew? His very being favored of God has turned to his disadvantage. He has been taught so much that he is puffed up and cannot learn. The heathen is, in this respect, better off than he. What, then, about him? What, in other words, about the races and peoples and individuals who have suffered misfortune under the divine pedagogy? With this problem the Apostle is less successful, argumentatively, than with the earlier ones. The matter is, as yet, too dim and unrevealed. But difficulties which the head cannot as yet solve, the heart prophetically can. So with the Apostle. Eye hath not seen, but the soul discerns. The method of meeting the problem to which he resorts is not in all respects satisfactory, and could scarcely have been so to his own mind. He comes to a conclusion hardly so much logical as poetic and that of quickened insight. God, he urges, has a right to do anything. The potter has a right to make or mar, at will, the vessel which is upon his wheel. Nevertheless, the Apostle cannot think of God as arbitrary. He turns, therefore, from a figure of mechanics to a figure of life. In the well-known process of grafting, the young tree which has been growing and putting forth great and promising energy, is rudely sawn off. A scion is inserted from another stock. This is done to enhance and to enrich the life of that family of trees. If, then, God had thought so much of the Gentiles as to saw off the Jews for the time being,

much more, in view of his direct and long-continued kindness to the Jews, will he be disposed similarly to make them, in turn, to become scions of a completer growth. "For God hath shut up all," the Apostle at length profoundly and prophetically exclaims,—“For God hath shut up all unto disobedience, that he might have mercy upon all.”

This outline, familiar enough to us all as regards the light which it throws upon the distinctive doctrine of the Reformation, is even more remarkable for the indication which it also affords, almost at the beginning of the life of the church, of a fundamental philosophy of Christianity, of the world, and of the universe.

According to this philosophy this is God's world. He is in it. He is manifesting himself through it. Legally and technically considered,—which is the contemporaneous point of view, and as a postulate, the Apostle's point of view also, though toward the end of the Epistle he works away from it,—men are therefore without excuse for not recognizing God and practicing a true ethics. Still retaining this legal and technical point of view, the Apostle goes on to chapter v., pointing out the dereliction alike of Gentile and Jew, and characterizing the essential thing which God's training of Israel had contemplated as the remedy, namely, the great, undefined, intrinsic, and expansive principle of faith. Elaborate though the Jewish training had been, this faith was at the heart of it from before the circumcision of Abraham, and had been made clear and practicable through Jesus. Thence to chapter ix. this principle of faith through Jesus is turned over variously and acutely, as regards the Spirit of God present in the human heart, and the whole matter, psychic and cosmic, is brought forward into that place in which men cannot be separated by energy of any sort, whether of life or death, of things present or things to come, from the love of God. Here is the

great Christed realm in which the Apostle most delights to move, and in this respect his climax is reached at the end of chapter viii.

But, having occupied the legal and technical point of view that men are without excuse, the difficulties, even amidst the glories of a manifested Christ, are so stupendous, as regards those races and persons at a disadvantage under the divine education, that he willingly leaves this Beulah Land, and passes down into the shadowy valley of the great problem turned over in chapters ix., x., and xi., in which, with faulty enough logic, but with profound insight and picturesque touch, traversing certain figures, he comes out to the conclusion that all have been shut up unto disobedience, that all may become subjects of the divine mercy. Here it is that his true climax is reached, and his true philosophy rounded out as he exclaims, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past tracing out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and unto him, are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen."

This great philosophical section, thus, not only concerns the distinctive doctrine of faith, but constitutes a broad, general survey of the whole life, world and universe, cosmic and psychic, in which God is self-revealing, in which men are being educated, in which peoples and nations have their respective parts to play, and in which no injustice shall be done, but in which, the rather, there shall be a grafting upon and regrafting, in order that God, somehow, may have mercy upon all. How greatly in contrast with such a survey is not only the pre-Reformation doctrine of salvation through works, but the almost continuous development of doctrine within the church from the beginning

until now, in a certain narrowness, failure to take account of all the facts, and failure to see life as it actually is! When, moreover, in connection with this great philosophical section, one recalls the culminating ethics of 1 Corinthians xiii., that love is the greatest thing, that as yet we see through a glass darkly, that only by and by we shall adequately know, what a warning have we here against thinking of God otherwise than in the light of the whole universe, and of the whole manifestation of him in mind, thought, aspiration and insight! Not by logic, but by figure, by insight, and by the use of the imagination, it is that the Apostle is able to bridge the dark valley into which he descends in the last division of his philosophical section; and figure, insight, and the use of the imagination must be involved in any adequate doctrine, either of God or of man.

2. *In the Old Testament—Job.*

Imbedded not only at the heart of the canon of the New Testament is there a document containing this suggested philosophy, but imbedded also at the heart of the canon of the Old Testament, there is another document, coming, by different processes, to an analogous conclusion. It is the Book of Job. The impression which that book has made upon the great minds of the world is nearly concurrent. In our own time to Carlyle on the one hand, and to Lowell on the other, it has seemed suggestive and profound to a degree scarcely equaled by anything else in the Bible, or in letters. Its literary method and its bold challenge of mightiest problems have succeeded in enkindling in the greatest minds, thoughts which have become germinally helpful to their conception of the world.

This book is an exquisite literary masterpiece. It concerns itself with the most general and profound thought, and yet has succeeded in being most specific and realistic

in method. Moreover, notwithstanding its abundant detail and its realism, it has skillfully avoided any allusion to contemporaneous political or religious conditions, so that, as far as mere language is concerned, one might never guess that there had been any Israel at all, any prophetic spirit, any stereotyping of religion into ritual, or any difficulties and problems involved in this vast educational process.

The principal character in this masterpiece is so real, and is so strongly drawn, that one can hardly doubt that it had its original; and, in this sense, a certain historicity would seem to inhere in the book. In many of its details, likewise, the book pictures the facts of a distinct age. Nevertheless, the whole method of treatment, the lofty march of the drama, and the simplicity and obvious artificiality of the dramatic method on the one hand, and, on the other, the strength and irresistibility of the movement of thought, indicate unmistakably that the final form of the document belongs to a period relatively much later than that of the original character. Such literary conditions clearly imply that, however primitive that character may have been, the poet who turns him to account speaks out of a time when not only the prophetic spirit and the ritual of Israel were well advanced, but when the perils to simple and adequate thinking, involved in the unfolding of these, had very seriously manifested themselves.

It is in the light of such considerations, fairly evident upon any detailed examination of the book even in its English form, that one must be on the alert for the book's great motive. What is it undertaking to say? What led such skillful literary hands so completely to conceal not only their identity, but the place at which they belonged in history; and to withhold those ordinary contemporaneous touches which any usual literary motive would certainly not have excluded, but used, the rather, turning them to most effectual account? So phenomenal a document, in-

volving powers of mind and moral force so great, and peculiarities so unique, should stir the soul, as the unique Epistle to the Romans stirs it, to the most determined purpose to ascertain precisely what it is that the book intends to say for all time. As St. Paul wrote, not as usual to a people and a place with which he was familiar, but to the world's capital, and wrote as he nowhere else writes, and therefore places his Epistle, but especially its philosophical section, for broad teaching purposes, at the forefront of everything which he wishes to say,—so should this equally unique Book of Job, with literary characteristics such as I have hinted at, become, in its essential teaching, in large degree a key and pivot for all that the Old Testament is trying to say to us.

What, then, does the book undertake to say? A certain character, for purposes of the poem, in every way prospers, and, in addition to this, is not only upright, but also devout, spiritually minded, and at the same time a practical philanthropist. This character comes under consideration in the court of Heaven. Satan, appearing there, charges that the man's excellence is based in self-interest, and obtains successive permissions, first, to deprive him of possessions and children, and, next, to make a fearful attack upon his life. The details of these two onslaughts are given—as, indeed, the possessions and good fortune of the man are earlier described—with an artificiality of detail so obvious that more or less of the filling in is clearly fictitious, however real may have been the original experience on which the poem is based. It is to the central character, thus bereft, and thus under fearful strain of disease, that certain typical thinkers of the time, in the guise of sympathizers, come. The book, in its main portion, consists of prolonged dialogue between these men and the chief character,—a dialogue which, after a time, is represented as being interrupted by God himself. He, answer-

ing out of a whirlwind, sets forth the true state of the case as between the disputants. To all this, as the account of the chief character's prosperous state constituted the prologue, so an account of blessings subsequently coming to that character constitutes the epilogue.

Must it not be evident that the great point of such a writing cannot lie in the particular contention, itself, between Job and those who, in attempting, from various points of view, to console him, succeed only in enhancing his miseries; but must lie, the rather, in the opposition between the whole human contention, with its intensifying of the suffering of its poor victim, and the true thought and outlook which should have been held, and which are suggested in the part of the dialogue that is put into the mouth of God? Moreover, while doubtless the great ethical and spiritual strength of the book lies in the chief character's maintaining his hold on God, notwithstanding all that tended in the contrary direction, and refusing to think uncandidly of himself,—a course which the theories of his consolers in greater or less degree required,—nevertheless, from the broad point of view of the relation of the book to its setting and method, is it not very clear that what God has to say in rebuke of the dogmatic postulates which underlie the contention of the friends of the sufferer, constitutes the motive, and moral, and pith of the book? What, then, in one sentence, is that definitely expressed sentiment? It is this (and our revised English translation rightly makes here not only a fresh paragraph, but a break in the text): "And it was so, that after the Lord had spoken these words unto Job, the Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite, My wrath is kindled against thee, and against thy two friends: for ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job hath."

Ah! the thing that is right has too generally not been spoken concerning God. It cannot be spoken without the

largest knowledge, the profoundest insight, the most conscientious regard for all the facts, and a reverent, waiting, expectant attitude toward that larger light, which, according to laws of the human mind, is continually breaking as knowledge grows from more to more, and the spiritual discernment of mankind deepens and broadens. The systems of religious thought, which, by slow stages and fearful travail, have succeeded one another through the ages, have only little by little made manifest to men the true things to be said concerning God. Nor, at any stage, least of all at the present stage, where ways part in so many directions, and all the indications point to yet vaster enlargements of knowledge and of insight, can the complete and final thing concerning God be said.

This is not to affirm that God is unknowable, or that our knowledge has no reality,—assertions not only destructive of knowledge, but tending to invalidate the mind itself; but it is to say that the greatest modesty, teachableness, openness of mind, expectancy of spirit, repression of the dogmatic temper, and unwillingness to bind one's self to systems of thought fast becoming outworn, ought to characterize all students of religious truth. The imbedding at the heart of the canon alike of the New Testament and of the Old, of such documents as the Epistle to the Romans, particularly in its philosophical section, and the Book of Job, with their familiar outlines of simple and profound truth, but with their utter refusal to remain at such positions, and their leaping forward, the rather, into vast and untried ranges of thought, and with, in particular, the stern chiding at the culmination of the Book of Job, of those who had dared to say concerning God the thing that was not right,—both these phenomena, in the inspired canons themselves, ought long ago to have sounded an alarm which should have prevented the narrowness, the tyranny, too often the outward calamities, and, during far the larger

portion of the time, the unprogressiveness by which theology has been characterized since the beginning of Christian history. Against these things the heart of the ancient and the heart of the newer Scripture alike protest.

II. THE WARNING FROM SCIENCE.

If "the invisible things of [him] since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made," God's self-revelation in nature is the primary revelation. How limited soever it may be, it is antecedent. However requiring to be carried farther, it is self-consistent. Nor can additional revelation contravene it. The witness of God is not self-contradictory. "It is impossible for God to lie." On this ground theology must listen to nature. It may not take *ex parte* testimony. The pattern shown in the mount requires that it should not do so.

I mention one other ground for the same thing. It is the inadequacy of language.

This principle underlies the incarnation. "God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in his Son." Nor so much has he spoken unto us by any words of his Son, as by that Son himself. That Son wrote no book. Even the perversions of him which were sure to occur, did not tempt him to entrust the sacred communication to any literary vehicle for forefending the same. His "many things to say unto you" he only partly communicated. He was himself the revelation. The word became flesh. Whoever had seen him had seen the Father.

So of the Sacraments. What God would say through those material symbols exceeded the containing power of human speech. Nor have any or all of the theories of the

respective Sacraments (frequently mutually contradictory, as when such pure and luminous spirits as Luther and Zwingli parted company regarding one of them) which have successively kindled the imagination of the church, begun to exhaust or even fairly to express what those same Sacraments have meant to the devout heart. Speech is an invaluable aid, a most serviceable instrument; but it can never take the place of concrete expression.

In a sort, nature itself is also sacramental. It bodies forth what can never be spoken; what can only, in fact, be most gradually apprehended.

"There is no speech nor language;
Their voice cannot be heard.

Their line is gone out through all the earth."

They declare the glory of God, and show his handiwork. This is the biblical as well as the rational postulate. The "firmament" and the "law" are bracketed as witnesses. At the mouth of the twain is every word to be established. The Devil tells us, "It is written." Jesus calmly adds, "It is also written."

Because, then, of the primary and antecedent revelation in nature, and because of the fact that the concrete is the more intrinsic kind of revelation,—as illustrated even in the incarnation and in the Sacraments,—theology is bound to listen to nature. Science, as the expression down to date of man's apprehension of nature, it must consult.

What, then, broadly speaking, has the heart of science to say, like the heart of the canon of the Old and New Testaments, as its admonition to theology? Precisely the same thing that the philosophical section of the Romans and the epilogue to Job has to say. The *caveat* of the canon parallels the warning from the study of nature. Take, briefly, three illustrations.

The most primitive man was set within the same infinite and speaking universe as that a fragment of which the Lick

telescope sweeps. But, with a confidence simply audacious, the first science, in fact nearly all science down to within five centuries, insisted that the universe was geocentric, the earth flat, and the heavenly host but its glittering illumination.

When, after painful and prolonged struggle, including ecclesiastical persecution in defense of theology as conceived to be involved in the controversy, the Copernican astronomy had supplanted the Ptolemaic, those same wonders of geology which broke like a revelation on the first half of the present century, were all around man, but were to him a sealed book. At length, toilsomely and amidst bitter contention, they won their place. The nebular hypothesis, in its essentials, made space intelligible, the stellar worlds thinkable, the emergence of this planet into its present condition rational.

Close upon this vast, horizon-widening achievement, with a swiftness almost appalling, has come a third generalization, multiform, applicable in many directions, and, if possible, yet more instructive. But it came not until one or two generations whose minds the revelations of geology had enriched, had missed the benefit of its additional fructification. In fact, to countless fairly intelligent persons, it is still a strange language, its profound underlying thought all unapprehended. I refer to the new sense of vitality in nature; of the world as informed; of force and of its potentialities; of a constructive power within the universe, seeking the line of least resistance and of highest achievement. This new sense expresses itself, comprehensively speaking, in the doctrine of evolution,—a doctrine still in its tentative stages, still needing much correction and enlargement, but already investing the thought of man and of God with new grandeur, significance and puissance.

So confident, in other words, was the dominant conception of the world—that is, the dominant science—in its pre-

vious attainments, that, until five centuries ago, a century ago, and the present generation, respectively, the Copernican astronomy, geology, with its correlate, the nebular hypothesis, and, comprehensively speaking, the doctrine of evolution, have been withheld from mankind. The truer science, indeed, under the impulse of the inductive philosophy, has not itself been holding back, since the moment when it gave itself to the inductive method; but the average scientific sense of man, and too many naturalists individually, have held back.

Does not this threefold experience of science, this testimony out of the heart of our slowly and painfully achieved knowledge of God in nature, lift up, then, its voice, along with chapters i. to xi. of the Romans, and along with the epilogue of Job, to plead with men, that, patiently, and with the constant anticipation of fresh light, they shall ever seek the better and yet the better to know God? Does it not join with that surpassing genius who wrought the legend of the Man of Uz into the great poem which bears his name in chiding theology if it speak not the thing that is right concerning God?

III. THE PRACTICAL NECESSITY.

In *The New World* for December, 1894, under the title, "Some Questions in Religion now Pressing," I have discussed somewhat in detail,—partly in considering certain traits of the time, and partly in drawing attention to the unsatisfactory and urgent state of certain primary theological questions,—the necessity for the reconstruction of theology. It is not my purpose at this point even briefly to recapitulate the considerations there adduced, and the inferences drawn therefrom. I only allude to the article because it covers with some pains a certain range of facts which unite with what I have thus far been saying to demand a fresh attitude in theology, and, as I think, its bold

though cautious reconstruction. Regarding the article itself, I desire only to add that, in the case of one or two of the questions summarily considered, for the sake of that inclusiveness which, in the science of theology, is a great desideratum, I have left certain matters somewhat open and tentative as yet, which, to my own mind, are measurably closed and established.

While, however, I do not go over the ground discussed in that article, I believe it capable of substantial proof that the traits of our time, its mental attitude, certain peculiarities of the entire situation near this close of the nineteenth century, and like considerations, join to demand, as of the greatest practical moment, a somewhat radical though tentative reconstruction of theology.

Moreover, coincidentally with these traits of the time, I believe that there are certain questions, primary to theology, in a state so unsatisfactory, and so unreconciled with well-established facts of nature and of mind, that not to put them at a fresh point of vantage by a somewhat fundamental change in the method of theology, by a new courage of outlook in it, and by fresh and large investigations within its entire field, is to deprive the principles involved in those questions of their due reasonableness, power over the mind of our time, and serviceableness in the upbuilding of spiritual life.

Those traits of the time to which I have alluded, on the one hand, and the present unsatisfactory state of certain primary questions in theology, on the other, unite, in short, in my judgment, to establish a most practical necessity for a new departure in the science of theology, for its true reconstruction; or, in brief, for its giving most earnest heed to that *caveat* in such matters, which, as I showed at the outset, is imbedded in the very heart of the canon of the Old and of the New Testament; and most earnest heed likewise to that warning from the backwardness of science

to apprehend that concrete revelation of God which nature constitutes,—the portentous matter which it next became our duty to consider.

The *caveat* of Scripture, the warning from science, and the practical necessity growing out of certain traits of the time, and out of the unsatisfactory state of theology, join, in other words, to render imperative that which, summarily, is to be considered in the remainder of this paper, namely, some re-making of theology.

IV. FUNDAMENTAL REQUIREMENTS.

Great progress has been making, within the present century, in the direction of a broader, simpler, profounder theology.

The Germans have given the subject infinite research and cogitation. They have moved especially along critical and philosophical lines. They have laid theological learning under measureless debt. But their theology, during this period, has been like the troubled sea. Not only has it had the life and movement of the sea, which are indispensable, but also the sea's unstable equilibrium. To us, with the blood of Britain in our veins, and with its craving at once for the spiritual and the practical in life, this is vastly unsatisfactory. Nor is its occasion far to seek. In the main, and characteristically, German theology has lacked that practical directive, and that scrupulous application to life, which have afforded a certain calm, and a certain constructive progress, to the theology of the English-speaking peoples during the same period.

In his helpful little book, "The Movement of Religious Thought in Britain during the Nineteenth Century," the late Principal Tulloch has outlined the saner and juster contemporaneous movement of theology in Great Britain. Since that book was published, Principal Caird's "The Evolution of Religion," and—to name that beloved scholar

whose lectures at Mansfield College in the summer of 1894, and at Western Reserve in that of 1895, have constituted the chief attraction of those respective Summer Schools—Principal Fairbairn's "Christ in Theology," have appeared as monumental indications of the fact that that movement is still fresh and strong and rich and in the path of destiny.¹

In America, Channing and Bushnell and Beecher and Mulford and Stearns, not to mention at all the living, have been among the foremost to attempt the transfer of theology out upon simpler, more rational, and more heart-affecting ground.

In the progress suggested by these statements, there is much to be thankful for. The fallow ground is breaking up. In some instances this is occurring faultily, as in defective and even destructive tillage of the ground; but, upon the whole, the earth is opening to sun and rain, the furrows thereof are watered and warmed, and their possibilities of productiveness and of beauty are greatly enhanced. In a wee book,—primer-like in its simplicity, and only like a "finder" to a telescope compared with such authorities as those to which I have referred,—"The Newer Religious Thinking," I have sought to outline the promise and glory of the whole general movement. Christ is the movement's center. It is from him and to him. The praise be to his blessed name!

And yet, brethren and fathers, may we not freely speak one to another? Are you satisfied with any progress yet made? Am I? Is any earnest and competent person? I do not refer to the imperfection and tentativeness common to all progress. I mean a more radical difficulty. I mention it to blame no one. The more capable thinkers have

¹To these books, on the hither side of the Atlantic, Dr. George A. Gordon has added, since this paper was prepared, "The Christ of To-day," a volume which at once takes rank among the foremost theological treatises of America, and of the period. Its depth, insight, eloquence, philosophical acumen, and rugged strength, give one new hope for our time.

been acting well their parts. The time was scarcely ripe. But it is fast ripening. These Summer Schools should accelerate the progress. They should help to usher in the better day. In plainest speech, and in bald outline only, I purpose to suggest certain directions in which, as I believe, this whole movement must become more thorough, more courageous, more epoch-marking, more life-giving.

1. *Things Which Cannot Be Shaken.*

There are, be it in the first place said, certain things which are unmovable. The yearning of the heart after God; its sense of an unseen world paralleling this,—Jacob's "Mahanaim," the interaction of the seen and of the unseen,—these are facts, differently explained, indeed, but so constant, so mighty in their influence, so dynamic, that they constitute a scientific basis for theology. The wiser thoroughgoing evolutionists like John Fiske, frankly say so. Our word "religion," in its not improbable etymology,—the "binding together," as we may express it, of the seen and the unseen,—happily expresses this.

Christ likewise is unmovable. Not theories about him. They have changed, and will change. But he abides. Account for him how we will, strip off from the doctrine of his person those dogmatic cerements with which—as with grave clothes, too often—he has been bound, and he simply abides, more glorious, still and ever, in the net account which is to be made for him. Oh, is it not pitiful to see so many hurrying hither and thither, to bulwark with their bishops' "encyclicals," and the like, the person of Christ, when, but let him alone, see him as he is, and he grows stronger ever? I have my theory of his person, as you all have yours; but he is utterly superior to any or all of our theories, depends on them not at all, and will abide if, as is not impossible, all of them are swept away. Oh, that we might but just let his light flood us, whoever and whatever

he is, and walk in his light, and follow him! Then, indeed, as he said, we should not walk in darkness, whatever our theology or lack of theology might be. The emancipation of Jesus from the hypotheses, provisos, and statutes of limitation within which we have tried to place him, into his own proper simplicity and largeness, is the one transcendent need of modern theology. He, like the religious faculty of man itself, however he is to be accounted for, is factual, primary, basal,—a part of that fossil-less rock on which the world is builded.

Another unmovable thing is experience. It is the counterpart of the religious impulse. It is accentuated in Jesus. No man may gainsay it. Like the habit of certain minerals to crystalize, like the habit of burning elemental substances to indicate certain bands through the spectroscope, so does the life of man answer true to itself in the realm of religious faculty. The pure in heart see God. They that hunger after righteousness are filled. The meek inherit the earth. Vision ensues upon adequate conduct. "No man," cried the lonely, intrepid, prophetic Robertson, blazing a path for us all through the then trackless forests,— "No man shall separate me from the Christ."

Correlative with this, and its slow deposit through the ages, like mighty fruitful prairies, is Scripture. Not the canon; not the story of the manuscripts; but, as says St. Paul, "every Scripture" inbreathed of God. Some of it is in the unlettered tradition of the Red Indian; some looks down from the monuments of Egypt; some is baked into the clay cylinders of Assyria; some is to be found in the far East, yea everywhere; preëminently it speaks to us out of the literature of that people which, of old, most of all opened its soul to be breathed on of God, and whose literature, therefore, and not by any partiality, nearest approaches the oracular. Inspired were all. God has spoken to men. He speaks still. His speaking to them is his token that

they are men, in his likeness, his children. If he has not spoken to you, he never spoke to any one. This vast deposit, of varying value, some of it hardly better than slag or refuse, some of it finest gold, is factual also. It is scientific basis for theology. Theology will never be worthy of utmost respect until it has planted itself four-square upon the whole of it.

The religious faculty thus referred to, the Christ, experience, and Scripture, in its only true wholeness,—these are unmovable. They cannot be shaken. The point of view may from time to time change. The *tout ensemble* may at length scarcely resemble at all what we conceive it to be now. But these will abide. Heaven and earth shall pass, but not these,—even as Christ, speaking of his word, but meaning himself, and thinking of himself as comprehending within himself all the others, said so bravely once upon a time.

2. *Need of a Scientific Basis.*

But while these specifications embrace, though not at all exhaustively, data whence theology may be safely constructed, there is much in the present fabric of theology which is not only open to challenge, but which even offends sound reason, is a stumbling-block to the spiritual life, and deserves that protest which the Book of Job was constructed to administer to the theology with which it was contemporary. We, too, have not spoken the thing that is right concerning God. As the present purpose is positive, not negative, I refrain from presenting examples, though I have plainly stated some of them in the article already referred to. What, on the positive side, the rather, are some requirements of a reconstructed theology?

One of them is a scientific basis. At present theology rests (1) partly on a basis of fact; (2) partly on authority,—which, indeed, may be factual in part, but which is involved in theories more or less attenuated and untenable;

and (3) partly on faith,—regarding which, again, there is often the greatest confusion of thought. There is but one authority,—that of reality. No authority can contravene the revelation of the unseen in nature and in right reason. There may be innumerable mysteries, but there cannot be unreason and absurdity. And as for faith,—it is the eye of the mind and of the soul. In this sense it is as real as existence is real. But faith in the other sense (which is the sliding scale introducing endless confusion),—faith in the sense of the content of faith, the sum-total of the things supposed to be perceived by the eye of faith,—the awakened and spiritual mind should never cease challenging that, as an astronomer challenges his observations of the stars, until the errors of every observation shall be more and more eliminated.

In place of this threefold basis,—fact, authority, faith,—theology should have but one basis, fact. Whatever belongs legitimately to the other two bases, is really only fact. Scripture does not claim any such authority as has been ascribed to it. Its sole legitimate authority lies in its facts, using that word in the inclusive sense just implied. Faith, too, is factual as the seeing eye, as an insight from above; but not as content of things supposed to have been perceived thereby, which must be always open to revision in conformity to the results of ampler and acuter vision.

We shall not be at an end of our confusions, nor make theology a respectable science in the eyes of very many whose respect it should command, nor put ourselves in the way of those great discoveries and enrichments which as much await this science as any other, until we have brought it upon this base. Unsuspected planets will not be descried, the magnificent rock-ribbed geology, so to say, of our science will not appear, and the true, vital, and evolving force of the same will not be felt until, as in physical sci-

ence, the slow, plodding, teachable, inductive process has been submitted to. The cost will be slight; the gain will be measureless. Besides, theological truth is far too noble and glorious to be demeaned by withholding it in any respect from this test. God, in the Job poem, was not afraid to test Job. The fire was fierce, but he stood it. The new Job was worth far more than the old, albeit he was sorely depleted for a time. Such will be the effect upon theology of the factual test. The dignity due the truth represented by it requires that it be placed upon a scientific basis.

3. *Conception and Function of Scripture.*

As I have already implied, the only ground on which Scripture can be held to convey a revelation, requires a larger definition of Scripture.

Scripture is that deposit of experience of the unseen which has come to us out of the past and comes to us in the present. Not in the canon only, not through a special people only, not mainly through any or all cults, but in the very life of our race, has God been speaking; that is, if he has been speaking at all, which may be fairly assumed. If he has ever spoken to anybody, he has spoken to you. If he has not spoken to you, he has spoken to no one. For it is a peculiarity of man to be spoken to from above. The voice of God, the "Wisdom" or "Word" of Holy Writ, is an inbreathing of God in man; is distinctive of man; is not partial, but universal.

This is not to deny degrees of God's speaking, or inbreathing, or inspiring. It is, in fact, the difference of degrees in this matter that has thrown us off the track. Owing to varying receptivity, parts of the message received have been infinitesimal; much of it has been of little practical worth. The Red Indian has little; the Indian by the Ganges, more; that people which became greatly recept-

ive, an extraordinary degree; and so forth. But all have some. Be it, however, hardly more than slag or refuse, or be it finest gold, it is all from one source, and must be received in its wholeness. "*Every Scripture*" inbreathed of God is profitable.

We are thus put upon a larger conception of Scripture. The very defense of Scripture requires it. Not only so, but the function of Scripture, *par excellence*, requires to be discriminated. What do the contents of the canon convey to us? "God's proclamation," we answer. "His revealed will." "His authoritative asseverations, to which his revelation in nature and in life must be squared as best we may square it." Ah, me! Was God, then, so put to it that he had to post up that Hebrew and Greek bulletin? Had his speaking power sunk so low?—not low in point of matter, for the literature is great, but low in the method, for no literature is the highest form of speaking. And is God thus the author of confusion? Nay, brothers; and if ever there was need to "try the spirits, whether they be of God," those spirits which claim to define revelation for us, and to limit and degrade theology thereby, have need of being tried.

What Scripture is trying to impart to us, is, the rather, a kindling of the soul; an openness of eyes to behold wondrous things through the revelation; such factual matter as shall inspire confidence and expectancy; such knowledge of things unseen as, by somebody's being in the process of enlightenment (which is always the Bible way), shall fructify our own knowing power. Let me illustrate:—

David had somewhat of Scripture. It served, in connection with personal experience, to open his eyes to something beyond, and in seeming outward opposition to Scripture, namely, that sacrifice and burnt offering were not the point which God had in view, but a broken spirit.¹

¹ While it is doubtful if Psalm li., as it stands, is David's, its temper is

Again, a large part of the conflict of the prophets, that which caused men not to believe their report, was their movement of thought, as it had been touched partly by such Scripture as they had, but more by God's speaking through their experience,—the movement of their thought out beyond anything that was as yet in Scripture. Almost to a man they were heretics. Scripture, and a speaking God, carried them beyond Scripture, and therefore they were stoned and sawn asunder.

Or take the most spiritual Gospel, the Fourth. Its whole method, though it lays down some guiding propositions, is to show how Christ was so with men, and was such to them, that they "believed on him." It had, not improbably, for its original climax, the surrender even of Thomas, after that stout and prolonged resistance of his, to the resistless presence of Jesus. In other words, the method of the Fourth Gospel assumes that Scripture's main intent is a process in the heart of the reader (which process it seeks to quicken), rather than mainly an objective content of knowledge.

Or take Christ himself. He is exceeding plain in the fifth of St. Matthew. The law, he says, shall stand. Heaven and earth shall not, but it shall. But how stand? By being broken. "Ye have heard that it hath been said" thus and so; "but I say unto you" that what that saying was driving at is the one authoritative thing, and that the letter, as it stands, is likely to damn you. The Pharisees could not see this. An ever advancing, never attained, horizon of Scripture was unintelligible to them. From their point of view, therefore, Jesus was a destroyer of Moses. And we likewise have, too often, regarding that

his, particularly in the part cited. The originality and sturdiness of his character, and the relation which his age holds to that of Solomon and to the age which succeeded that, imply such a temper in him. Note, likewise, the insight of our Lord's allusion to him, Matt. xii. 3, 4.

Scripture which we possess, a view which, but supply the conditions, would lead us, and does actually tend to lead us, analogous lengths.

These examples may illustrate my point. Not only must we enlarge our conception of Scripture, but we must apprehend its true function, as a kindling of the soul, an opening of the eyes, an awakening of expectancy, and a pointing out to us by factual illustration, how we too may make the personal achievement of righteousness. And, brethren and fathers, to say truth: I, for one, never saw that part of Scripture which is within the canon in such beauty, and glory, and inspiring power, as in these last years, since I have seen in that Scripture precisely what I see in all other Scripture, and hear in my own soul,—albeit in superlative degree in that Scripture,—namely, an inbreathing of God to stir to duty, to aspiration, to greater hunger to know the truth, and to greater power to live the truth. Oracle of God, in such a sense, the canon indeed is, but to be heard in connection with all other oracles, and, above all, in connection with the oracle within. For whatever God was to Isaiah, or to St. Paul, or to St. John, such, too, must he be to you and to me,—a Speaking Presence; and if he be not that, even Isaiah and St. Paul and St. John will be but unintelligible sound to our souls.¹

V. THE LINE OF DIRECTION.

When theology shall have placed itself upon a scientific

¹ The universality of inspiration is maintained throughout this section of the essay, and that the inspiration of the Bible ("Scripture, *par excellence*") is unique, not in its kind, but in its superlative degree. It is just to the writer, and perhaps also to the reader, to add:—

The intrinsic distinction of the Bible, that which places it in a category by itself, is its witness (inspired in superlative degree) to certain primary redemptive facts. These, while manifold, various, and intricate, are, comprehensively speaking: (1) Such a training of the world, but particularly of Israel, that the right line of approach was open to conceptions of God, of man, of duty, and of destiny; and (2) The culmination of all this in Jesus Christ.

basis; when, humbling itself that it may be exalted, it shall have followed the example of physical science, and submitted itself without reservations to the inductive process; when, beyond this, availing itself of one of its great *principia*, experience, and resorting to the major portion of this *principium*, namely, the experience of our race, a deposit which has come down, partly outside of letters and partly in letters, but, all of it, properly apprehended, Scripture to the awakened spirit,—the inbreathing of God into the souls of men,—when, I say, so availing itself of experience in its major portion, theology, in respect of Scripture (both in general, and *par excellence*), shall have formed not only so large a conception of Scripture as this, but shall have apprehended its function as, that of enkindling the soul, enlightening the eyes, and challenging man's whole being, by example and other factual matter, to come out into larger life, rather than as principally the imparting of a content of objective knowledge, the entire content being but, as it were, the blazing of a path out toward the never-to-be-overtaken horizon of enlightenment and growth;—when, I say, theology shall have done this, then shall a new day indeed dawn for religion. The splendid discoveries of physical science, achieved through resorting to such a method, will not outshine those spiritual discoveries which shall then hasten to break upon the world.

What, in general, will be the line of direction in this reconstruction of theology?

1. Our *a priori* rubric of theological instruction will be mainly set aside. The cumbrous, undemonstrating demonstration of the existence of God, through "Natural Theology"; the sudden and almost contemptuous dismissal of that theology, thereupon, in order to take up "Revealed Theology" (as if a man could receive anything, even so supposedly superfluous a thing as "Natural Theology," except it be given him from above!); the section on the Di-

vine Being, attributes, and government; this department shuffled hastily out of in order to contemplate at inordinate length a moral cataclysm, a great overwhelming of God's plan through sin, which he is remedying as best he may (for the inventors of such a table of contents for dogmatics inferred, and rightly if their premise were correct, that the attributes and government of God might be best known by contemplating him, not as he is manifesting himself on every hand and within every heart, but as he resorts to supposed makeshifts for the remedying of the cataclysm); the intricacies and mysteries of soteriology (which, did we but know it, are just as intricate and mysterious, and no more, as is sunlight melting the frosts, summoning the crocuses from underneath the snow, absorbing the noxious exhalations of earth, and making the dull world a garden of God);—all these, and much more, of the major part of which the next best thing to never having heard of them at all, is swiftly to forget them, for no childlike soul ever yet found God by the help of, but, the rather, in spite of them,—all these, I say, and much more, will either be dismissed altogether, or will be greatly abridged, subordinated, and readjusted in the matter of emphasis.

2. But this line of direction concerns method only, and is negative. Not so of the next. The primary thing, in the reconstructed theology, will come to the front. A definition, demarcation, and inductive and experimental study of the religious faculty, and of all which that involves, will then advance into the foreground. The undemonstrable being of God is there nearest approached. The more that range shall be studied, on its many sides,—and especially, at theological schools, by each student's employing the "laboratory method" within himself, and by instructors' and students' doing "seminar" work within their own number, and amongst those about them,—the more thoroughly grounded in its "evidences" will the mind become.

Men, in such a case, cannot but testify the things which they have seen and heard. Scripture, too, in the large sense, will be especially studied in this connection. The *Theologica Germanica*, and the temper of Erasmus, when so approached, will prove not to be in conflict. A holy life, a "retreat" or "mission," and yet a perpetual advance and gospeling, will grow normal to him who so prosecutes theology. If such a one be a preacher, he will go forth so grounded in an inner and factual sense of God, that, like Maurice or Phillips Brooks, he will interpret God to men out of the very experiences of their lives. And he will be, himself, in such a temper that he will, in his own person, be a discoverer of spiritual things, a prophet of God with open vision.

3. A theology so grounded,—grounded where Abel, and Moses with shining face, and David, and Isaiah, and Stephen filled with the Spirit, and Paul, by whom a man was wont to stand speaking in the night, and John of peerless insight, were wont to ground it; yea, where Christ himself grounded it, saying, "The pure in heart shall see God,"—a theology so grounded, will pass thence out upon the great tablelands of theological knowledge. The indwelling of the Spirit of God in men; the processes, simple but profound, of the upbuilding of spiritual life; a right, Christed ethics; God's ways with men, everywhere, under all religious conditions, and in all manifestations of himself to them,—these expansive fields, and such as these, will be seriously and broadly and courageously entered upon. Above all, that desire of certain Greeks, which stirred the soul of the Christ as no other single human contact seems to have stirred him,—that sublime request, "Sir, we would see Jesus," will be heeded. We shall have a theology which will show Jesus to men. He shall be held up to them,—his person, his temper, his thought, his life-impressing, life-renovating character. It will be "Evolution

of Religion," and "Christ in Theology," then, truly. And then, as when the Greeks asked the question, the hour will have come, the Son of man will be glorified, and, at that precise moment, will have arrived "the judgment of this world."

VI. DISCOVERIES AND EFFECTS.

I have but suggested, without definition or explication, and, it may be, far from correctly, the general line of direction of the reconstructed theology. What will be its traits, its lines of discovery, its effects? You will understand that, in answering this question, as in answering the preceding, I can only throw out a suggestion or two.

The reconstructed theology will be most studious and teachable. Spiritual and intense, it will none the less keep a cool head and clear vision. It will traverse widest ranges. "Nothing," to paraphrase Terence,—“Nothing which affects man will be alien to it.” What man is, looked at from the spiritual side; therefore looked at from the psychic side, the social side, the functional and physical side; what human society is, its true laws, its proper economics, its right claims; the problem of redeeming weakened or damaged or abnormal moral life; how, in short, truly, in broad and inclusive lines, to save men, will engage its consecrated and concentrated powers. But when such a theology enters adequately upon these researches, prosecuting them always in Christ's spirit, which is a practical, applied, and experiencing spirit, shall we not, think you, get discoveries as notable in these ranges, as any physical discoveries with the fame of which the world has resounded?

Again the life toward God, the life of prayer and of thought, the blowing where it listeth of the Spirit, its mysterious impulses, in fact, the whole subject of the reciprocal interaction of the seen and unseen worlds,—matters, after all these Christian centuries, almost as little exploited scientifically as electricity was, say at the middle of the pres-

ent century,—will be as patiently and inductively studied as electricity has been, since that time, and,—can we question?—with as marked results. For nothing happens by accident in the spiritual world, any more than in the physical; and the reconstructed theology will set up its observatories, poise its transit to tell the hour of noon, and bring celestial glories near to men.

Above all, in the range of motive, of “how to perform,” as St. Paul expressed the desideratum, will research and discovery be made. There is but one transcendent motive. The Apostle hastened to express it. “Through Jesus Christ, our Lord”; or, “The love of Christ constraineth me.” But surely such a motive, the source of spiritual life and health, must needs be of more certain and determinable application than St. Paul or St. John, even, found it among their contemporaries. In this highest matter,—the relation of the soul to Jesus, the bringing it under his power, can we doubt that a vital theology, such as we are thinking of, will make discoveries and practical applications which will change the face of the world?

What will be the effect of such a theology? To break, in the range of dogmatics, many graven images, wrought, some of them, of finest gold, with holiest intent, but idols still, taking the place of God, and destined to be ground to powder, and the ashes of them to be drunk by those who persist in adhering to them.

Also, a great sifting of men. Very many persons will not study theology then, or teach it, or serve on boards of trustees of its schools, or preach it, or battle for it in ecclesiastical courts, who do so now. One by one, a great number of them, being condemned in their own hearts, as when Jesus wrote on the ground, will go out.

But their places will be more than made good. Many a true man, who, at present, cannot, with mental self-respect, enter a theological school, will do so then. Many a dead-

in-earnest man, who, although not prevented by intellectual obstacles, has, nevertheless, an obstacle of spirit,—who proposes to sell his life more dearly than in prosecuting branches and refinements of study, precious to the theologian, but useless if not baseless; or, in minding ecclesiastical leading-strings, or disregarding them at his peril; and, than in the ineffectiveness and inanity which too frequently mark a ministry reared under a decadent theological system,—many a dead-in-earnest man, I say, deterred for reasons like these, will hasten to enter upon the severe studies, the brave, Spirit-led life, and the grand achievements which such a theology will render possible to the ministry of Jesus.

Radical will such a theology be, with the fearlessness, the freshness, the power of changing the face of the world, which it had in Jesus, in St. Paul, in Savonarola, in Luther and in Maurice. The Bible will not be its collection of proof-texts, to be used by concordance, but its marching music, its battle hymn, its

“Ein' feste Burg ist unser Gott,”

sounding like a trumpet through the soul.

And such a theology will come. There are persons already alive who will dedicate their whole being to it, who will sacrifice the vitality of their lives in its development and defense, and the child is already in his cradle who will see it triumphing throughout the world. Missions will get meaning then. The churches will not be half empty any longer. There will not be any problem of reaching the masses with the gospel in that day. And, most important of all, the lamp of Christian living, too often low and flickering now, will blaze like a beacon fire in multitudes whom no man can number all over this earth.

If we can speed its advent, let us be at it.

At any rate, let us not block its way.

And Christ's shall be the glory! AMEN.