

## ARTICLE IV.

THE CLAIMS OF THEOLOGY.<sup>1</sup>

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FATHERS and brethren: The position in which I speak to-day, and your choice in placing me here, have determined beforehand my theme of discourse. It would be presumed I should speak of the Claims of Theology, and such shall be my theme; but in speaking of these claims it will be quite appropriate to have some special regard to our own times.

It is evident, however, that we cannot well appreciate the claims of theology, or wisely apply it to meet the wants of our time, till we have defined to ourselves the idea itself of theology, or what it imports or demands. The answer to this question, therefore, will first require our attention. This I apprehend we shall find to be threefold.

1. The first demand is a *personal* God, who may be apprehended as such. Evidently, if there were no personal God, or if he could not be known, we could have no theology.

Before this audience, and on such an anniversary occasion, you would hardly allow me to suggest that you need vindicating for the interest you feel in your Seminary. Those who have cherished it with sincere devotion and unwearied effort for a generation, and whose interest only increases with their years, would not tolerate the implication that I need any justification for accepting your appointment to stand with them, and in the place of my worthy predecessor, to maintain this as an Institution of sacred learning.

But surely we cannot follow far the tendency of modern thought to see that your interest and my acceptance of the chair of systematic theology in this Institution must both

<sup>1</sup> An Address delivered on the occasion of Professor Herrick's Inauguration as Back Professor of Systematic Theology in Bangor Theological Seminary, Aug. 1, 1867.

alike be fully vindicated, or not at all. For, the line of distinction between a belief and a disbelief in the supernatural, between a belief and a disbelief in a personal God, is becoming every day more sharply defined. Whether truth for man lies wholly in the natural world, or in part, and quite as really, in the supernatural also; whether, in fact, we have a theology about which professors and students, ministers and churches and private Christians, need so much concern themselves; this is the question which we are to solve; and we must be definitely fixed in our beliefs, or this modern thought will fix them for us.

Or, granting your foundation to be a safe one, granting you have valid reason for your belief in the supernatural, as I thoroughly hold, I would then say, there are those who would withdraw from under you your firm support; and who, if they find this impossible, would prevent others from coming safely upon it, preferring to let them float amid the rocks of infidelity, or become wrecked on the shoals of scepticism.

Suppose the assumption at once thrust upon us — God forbid we should entertain it — that our finite minds cannot possibly reach forth to the infinite, and that, therefore, there is for us no actual, personal God, who can be the centre and life of a system of theology; what would then be left us?

Why, indeed, deny the existence of a personal God, and our professed revelation from him is not a reality, and our biblical exegesis might as well be an exposition of Newton's Principia. Our best system of theology would be only a concatenation of useless abstractions, worthy of no living age or people; we should have no distinctive church history for no life of Christianity upon earth; and worse still, no Incarnate Deity, and no Holy Ghost; and, of course, all our preaching of what we call the truth of God and the gospel of Christ would be the height of human folly; and in this case, too, our theological seminaries might better cease to be.

Nay, but let this hypothesis be true, and what would then be left to human life on earth? What to the individual soul? Every unlettered Christian would feel himself robbed thus

of his dearest treasure; nay, the unconscious longings of every finite spirit, when rightly interpreted, declare that on this supposition, that is not left which belongs to it, and which it may claim as a birthright possession.

Do you ask, "Why speak thus?" I answer, for no other reason than to set in bolder relief the positive truth of God.

Certainly we cannot create God out of our finite reason, as it is said Fichte once proposed to do. And yet starting from this, we ought to find him; for we have a consciousness of God, however in many cases it may be held in unrighteousness and abused.

If, as Paul affirms, God may be known by the things made, surely the one thing of all others which is the strongest proof, is this creature man, endowed with reason and conscience,—with reason that he may think of the Creator and his works; with conscience, that he may feel himself bound as a finite person to obey the Infinite Father.

To any atheist who would be honest, the question might well be put: "What mean these moral feelings and intuitions if they have no corresponding object?" It is true, and no one ought to be ignorant of it, that the moral set the intellectual powers in motion, and prompt their search after God, rather than the reverse. It is in our moral convictions and intuitive perceptions of God that all our inquiries in respect to him have their rise. Our sense of responsibility more than that of dependence points towards him. For this responsibility is grounded in free-agency and finite personality, and hence declares our relation to a free personality, infinite and uncreated, also, our reason adds. Hence, likewise, God cannot be a pantheistic "Welt-Geist," or soul of the world; but a first-cause, independent of his works, while creating them by his own spiritual activity.

Our interest thus awakened, we may press our inquiries through the outward works of the Creator, and find profit by so doing, especially if we interpret his works by his word; for, as has been well said, the Bible alone, with the help of one's own conscience, is sufficient proof of being divine. I

say we do thus come to realize more and more distinctly, that he with whom we have to do is a spirit, self-sustained, needing nothing from without, yet able to put forth from himself laws, and to create a universe, which is still his in all the parts thereof, everywhere upheld and controlled by him, and for his own ends. Thus is a personal God, knowable and known, the first demand of a true theology.

2. But if there is a personal God, and if he has created a universe of finite beings, then he, *as such*, must be the centre of the whole system.

The more we study the world of nature, the more thoroughly convinced we become that what of life it possesses is due on the one hand to its pervasive laws, and on the other, that this life and these laws are dependent upon, as they were ordained by, God. As we advance from the material, we find, indeed, laws of life in the vegetable and animal kingdoms; but there is one fact incontrovertable, which, related, as it is, like a higher law, to all the laws of the created universe, material and animal, ought to be accepted as undoubted proof of their subordination and dependence. I mean this: that they are limited to their own sphere. For example, simple attraction can draw bodies together, but it needs another law to produce crystalization; nor can crystalization beget chemical combination, electricity, or magnetism. And it is not in the power of all these agencies combined to originate life; nor in the sphere of life can the vegetable pass into the animal; still less can all the forms of animal life beget a rational soul; spiritual life is distinct, separated, as by the impassable gulf, from all below it, having its own sphere and its own laws.

Nor is this law of limitation of which I speak a self-imposed one. On the other hand, if we are to credit the naturalists, it would seem the lower laws have been trying hard ever since the world was made, and a long time before, to do the work of the higher, and to prove them unnecessary, or at least of the same kind with themselves.

But unfortunately, with the help of all their advocates,

every attempt has proved a failure; in spite of the utmost zeal of these midwives, every child has been still-born; and it remains true, as it was in the beginning, and ever shall be, that each new species, each kind differing from the preceding, came into being by a direct fiat of the Almighty, by a word of the personal Jehovah, who is omnific creativeness, limited in his products by nothing out of himself, only by his own good pleasure.

But before the work of his hand appeared, in which its formative law inheres, was this law then self-sustained? Where was it, but in the mind of the all-wise Creator, possible then, to be sure, but to become actual only according to his will, but by no means to be independent of him.

In ourselves we unite the material and spiritual, the natural and supernatural, and are permitted to verify in experience both higher and lower laws; but those of animal life and those of spiritual life, the mental and moral laws of which we are conscious, are all God's as to source and authority.

Indeed, he ordained the laws of man upon the earth in all his manifold relations; nor has he let them go out of his hand, so that now the nations and the race are independent of him, being a law unto themselves. By no means. Tell me, rather, what is human history if we do not rise high enough in our conceptions to find God's power and wisdom displayed in the different nations, and through the successive ages; showing some phase of his wise design, preparing for, or working out, some part of his majestic plan, the realization of which he is causing to move forward, however unconscious of it sin-blinded mortals may be; while they nevertheless weave the woof into those invisible threads held in the hand of him who worketh all in all. Why, surely God must be the great centre of all our knowing. For all we can know is either about the Maker or the things made; and the latter everywhere point us up to the one original fountain of all being.

But think again: Can truth in its highest form, truth as ultimate, be separated from a personality? A personal God

must, of necessity, be the centre of all truth that does not die out in abstractions and dead forms.

But more of the system, since we are seeking a theology which is the science of God. May we have here an order, a system, or not? What is it, let us ask, but the adjustment of sun, planets, and satellites, and their orderly and harmonious movements among and around each other, that gives occasion for speaking of the solar system? And what are our separate sciences but an understanding of the laws which pervade and limit the several fields or spheres of actual knowledge? And whence comes the order of these parts, if not from a higher order; if not from their belonging to the universal system of which God is the author?

The fact, too, is suggestive, that when we know thoroughly one of the so-called sciences, we presume that others will in like manner be pervaded by law and order. Strange indeed, then, beyond measure strange, if God's moral universe, highest, because spiritual, should be found to be lawless! No; it cannot be. Though the central idea, its unifying principle, may lie above us and not be clearly discerned by our weak vision, nevertheless, if we could attain to it, we should find it perfect order and giving harmony to all. Thus astronomers, who suppose our system and other like suns and systems to have a motion among themselves, and around some far-off centre, all having yet another centre, are sure, if it be so, that the whole must still be controlled by the law of unbroken harmony.

And what must that theology be which has for its centre, not some pantheistic abstraction, no more satisfactory, as an ultimate, than the huge tortoise-shell of the heathen cosmology, but an independent and personal — independent, because personal — Jehovah! If he, the All-wise is perfect order, let us banish forever from our minds the false notion that no system of theology is possible. This system, with the personal God at its centre, is the second requisite.

3. In a system of revealed truth Jesus Christ must be the actual and personal centre. In idea, no doubt, a true theol-

ogy begins with God. And yet, in order to attain it, we may need to go forth from our earthly habitation, our finite consciousness, and philosophize before we theologize. So in astronomy, there is a sense in which we must be geocentric before we can be heliocentric; and in order that we may be, we must first find an exact measure on the earth. But this is only that we may safely transfer ourselves to the astronomical heavens, and verify all our estimates from the true point of view there. Indeed, if "natural theology" does not raise us so far it is of no value. But we are most concerned with a system of revealed truth; and in this the person of Christ is central. It is not without reason that those who reject revelation attack it at this point. It is not without reason that believers in revelation concentrate their interest in Jesus of Nazareth; for he is the touchstone of all theology. Reject him as divine, and you have no theology; accept him as divine, and you find manifest in him all that can be known of God. It is thus, too, obviously, that the Christian system is sharply distinguished from all others.

A personal Christ must be our actual centre: First, because he is the divine Revealer; and this, not like some Mercury, who can only declare what is taught him, but rather as being himself the revelation. And the Logos of the New Testament and the Jehovah of the Old being one and the same, what if from the beginning it was necessary that he, and he alone, should be the Revealer? Be this as it may, we do know that in these last days God has spoken to us by his Son, and the pregnant words, "Hear ye him," are evermore spoken for the head as well as for the heart of men.

Again, Christ as the unifier of the system marred by sin, must be our centre. We have here a most fearfully disturbing element to deal with; and unless taught by him who can bring order out of chaos, we shall find no solution of the deep, dark problem of sin. We need to know, as we can know only when instructed by the Redeemer of men, how God regards sin, whether simply as a foible, an infirmity, as an excusable turning from the mark, as a necessary step to

something higher, or as a culpable breach of the divine order, — actual guilt; and that we may know, not merely how he regards it, but what he does with it and on account of it as existing in rational creatures. And the light which must guide us is the light of the cross; the law which must reconstruct the discordant system is the law of redemption in Christ Jesus.

And, in the third place, he must be the centre, since he alone can bring us into harmony with the divine order, and thus fit us to see the truth as it is. Christ is the life and the light both in one person, and is able to raise us from a death of sin to a life of righteousness, while he scatters our moral darkness, or by doing it to scatter our darkness. It is the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus that makes free from the law of sin and death; and how essential this freedom is that we may appreciate the truth of God. The more we strive, through the grace imparted, to be one with the highest law which God has ordained for us, the more do we see the Father revealed in the face of his divine Son.

But shall we, let me now ask, when we speak of the remedial system, shall we make the remedy everything, and the system nothing? Because *in* the mystery of redemption are we *out* of the sphere of law and order? I answer in the emphatic *μη γένοιτο*, God forbid, of the apostle Paul, whose epistles, in form as well as matter, answer in the negative. In very deed is not redemption God's great work for all time? And can it be any more separated from his other works than from himself? How much more consistent to say that in its height and depth and breadth and length, — including probation, including providence, including the incarnation and the divine atonement, including the drawing of the Father and the personal agency of the Spirit, — who can tell just how much it does include, or how much it does not include? I say in all this mighty, however mysterious, work of the Triune Deity and of the Incarnate Son, there must be harmony of parts. And, though we do need to be taught of God by a revelation from heaven; yet having this revelation, it remains for



us to study reverently, but diligently, the oracles of divine truth, that in them we may find our materials, and gain therefrom what help we can in arranging the great facts of human sin and divine redemption, and the several doctrines connected with them, into an orderly and complete system of revealed truth, and hence into a system that shall be one with all truth. We shall thus approximate, if we do not fully realize, the conception of the Moravian poet :

“I'm apt to think the man  
That could surround the sum of things, and spy  
The heart of God and secrets of his empire,  
Would speak but love. With him the bright result  
Would change the hue of intermediate scenes,  
And make *one* thing of all theology.”

If now from this view of what theology is, we ask in regard to its claims, which are of a more general and universal character, to express the whole in fewest words, we find these to be twofold, though not separable, resulting first from its comprehensiveness, and secondly from its law of life which inheres in our personal and divine Redeemer; or rather, in its all-comprehending law of life.

Says another: “Theology, being the science of God, is the ocean which contains and embraces all other sciences, as God is the ocean in which all things are contained.”<sup>1</sup> All-comprehending, let us say, first, in giving to each its proper place and relative importance; and secondly, in unifying all possible knowledge in the system which has for its centre a personal Jehovah.

But the total elevating and educating influence of theology it were not possible to declare, not even to conceive, it so pervades literature, art, science, politics, affects man in so many ways,—as an individual, in domestic life, in social life, in civil life,—everywhere and in all respects; and for this reason, primarily, because through it the wisdom of God is let down upon our finite minds to enlighten and guide them, and which, in proportion as we are willing to be enlightened

<sup>1</sup> Donso Cortes, as quoted in Brownson's Catholic World.

and guided by it, makes us as much wiser as God's thoughts are broader, higher, better than ours. Theology, by being what it is, is comprehensive and thorough.

But again, let us not doubt that by being what it is it does more for man through its moral than through its intellectual influence. It does not put knowing before being, but the reverse. It proposes moral ends, even the highest, placing the ultimate, not below, but above; not in things made, but in the Maker; not in man but in God; teaching us that we should live for others, and make God's will, as the highest reason, our supreme law. And what a mighty influence has thus been, and is to be, wrought among men.

I know it may be said that this moral renovation can be accomplished without a system of theology; that Christianity as a religion more than as a theology strictly, transforms the world, elevates, inspires high aims, sets forth a perfect standard, and not only promises much, but gives strength to attain the high end proposed.

No doubt there is force in the distinction. But if Christianity is a life, it is a law of life at the same time; and the better we understand the law the more wisely can we deal with the life. The religion of Jesus Christ is not freedom from law, but freedom in law. To be sure, it is most essential we keep in mind that we have to deal with spiritual truth; hence, our system must not degenerate into empty forms, but remain so in harmony with its living centre as to be a true expression of the highest life. Our human imperfection may fall short of this ideal, and yet we must strive for it, that we may hold fast the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus. Observe, moreover, that a true religion implies a genuine theology; and that Christianity in the world has ever been striving to find a rational basis, to show itself in harmony with reason.

There are historic facts also which are suggestive. For instance, England's greatest men—Milton, Bacon, Shakespeare, and the rest—were produced in what was pre-eminently her theological age. Then poets, statesmen, and

philosophers were theologians, and ministers were nothing without a "body of divinity" in their heads and in their sermons. Take from its literature its theological element, which first helped to mould these men, and which they then helped to develop, and the "Elizabethan age" would sink to a level with other ages.

What, again, would have been the permanent influence of the Reformation had it left no system of theology? Or shall we say that Calvin and his "Institutes" proved as necessary as Luther and his German Bible? And what does it mean that in the very time of the upheaval the bold Reformer needed Melancthon with his "Loci communes" by his side, if not to fix thereby what of doctrine had been reclaimed through the influence of his preaching and that newly translated Bible?

And is it not likewise in the wider sense true that the generations perpetuate their influence through succeeding ages mainly by systems of thought? False religions and philosophies hope to live on from age to age only by the help of some system, like that of Mohammed or Confucius. The Platonic and Aristotelian age continues to influence the minds of men almost wholly through the systematic thought of the masters. It was thus that Hobbes and Hume, in their way, got to themselves a name. And our modern Positivists hope to extend their influence and usher in the new dispensation, only by making as perfect as possible their nature-system. And does the analogy lose its force in theology? Surely, living, earnest preaching is needed to awaken and direct the religious life of a period. Chrysostoms and Luthers and Whitefields are greatly needed to quicken and intensify the religious life of the church. But, for the most part, the best preachers have been well trained in a system of theology. There is no better popular definition of rhetoric than Lyman Beecher's, "Logic set on fire." The most effective eloquence must repose on philosophy and systematic thought; of this fact Burke and Webster are good illustrations.

Nor can it be doubted that much awakened life dies out because not fixed by a right perception of its spiritual laws. And I think it may be justly affirmed that what is gained to the church as her heritage for after ages from this awakened life, making it one and continuous, is largely due to her Augustines and Anselms and Calvins and Howes and Owens, who give systematic data and outward form to the inward and spiritual life of Christianity.

But to bring our subject nearer the form and pressure of the times; have we now special need of a true and pervasive theology?

To gain an answer to this question, let us again refer to the strong tendency of the present age to ignore the supernatural. Pantheists, infidels, and positivists are agreed in doing it. Scientific and literary men — not all of them, for the Hugh Millers, Pye Smiths, Hitchcocks, Sillimans, and Danas are noble exceptions; but some (and we could wish their number less), not only in Germany and France, but also in the two most Christian countries on earth, join them in it. And to what is the rationalizing church-party in England tending, if not to the same result? These men, if they do not directly affirm it, imply and teach that nature is all, and that there is no supernatural world. And yet, who so much as they, claim to think in a connected, self-consistent, and complete system, which includes — to borrow Herbert Spencer's expression — the entire "rational curriculum" of possible knowledge? Who so much as they, boast of having found, each in his own way, the Eureka of all human desire? Is it not then presumable that when they make their thrusts at theology, the basis of true religion, it is with intent to have the superstructure fall to the earth? Why, to them religion is superstition, and the sooner it vanishes the better; while theology, belonging to the "dark ages," either has already gone, or ought at once to go, into desuetude. Where, in one of their systems, by the side of it, or in any way attached to it, can place be found for a theology that is such indeed?

Is the question as to absolute truth? Human reason is the

judge that must end the strife, if any such end is possible. Is it as to inspiration? Homer and Milton, Plato and Newton, were inspired quite as much as Isaiah, Paul, or John, or even Jesus Christ. Although the later wise men, in coming nearer the central light of pure reason, can, in this respect, claim superiority to them all. If the question be of laws, they are written in the volume of nature; and it is of course easy for positive science to declare them all. Would you most thoroughly educate the individual — and what but to be educated does he need? — then set him to the study of nature that he may understand what she is; or if you would elevate the race, then correct your principles of civilization, — and the manipulations of Buckle, Spencer, and Draper, will greatly aid in this, — and so corrected, apply this mighty power of civilization to meet the demands of an advancing age.

Now let it be thoroughly understood that we do not at all object to the study, the thorough study, of nature. What we oppose, and ought to oppose with all the interest we can feel in a divine religion, is the determination to shut man up to this lower sphere, and to give him no range beyond or above it.

And these theories — which we must never forget are intended to be practical, and to bear directly on the great problem for all time of human existence and human weal — these theories, I say, are to a large extent pervading the popular mind, and taking in it the place of the saving truth of a supernatural religion.

If you ask, "How is this heaven being infused?" I answer, It is not by directly denying revelation; but by saying very little about it; not by affirming that the Bible is not worthy of being believed and taken as an infallible standard, but by making the laws of nature supreme, and demanding that they, and not God's law, shall be our practical as well as intellectual guide; not by openly advocating Pantheism, but rather a reverence for the mystery and science of nature; not by omitting to mention God and religion, but by using these and other sacred terms in a new sense, of the real import of which the uninitiated are little aware; nor yet is it by declaring

that there is no need of the grace of God and a higher life begotten by God's Spirit to perfect and save humanity, but by insisting upon the necessity of a rational nature-development, with the implication that this is all-sufficient.<sup>1</sup>

Now we know that every device for the race or the individual which leaves no room for man's relation to a personal God, and no possibility for revelation and the grace of God to reach him, will and must in the end prove a failure. However attractive and whatever its application, a mere system of naturalism cannot, while disregarding the world to come, make man perfect even for this world. All theories of reform and salvation devised by men deceive only to destroy.

And what, with emphasis it should be asked, what shall save us from this powerful current of systematic error, whose practical and moral effects are evil, but a system of divine truth, whose practical effects are only good?

If we would successfully withstand the schemes of theology and scepticism that teach us to disregard a direct revelation from the Father of Spirits, we must vigorously oppose to all gospels ordained by men a system that has in it a living God, a living Christ, and a quickening Spirit. We must set forth in bold relief a theology that comes down from God out of heaven, and is able to draw men up there, as well as having a light to point the way, and not one that springs from human nothingness, not able to remove the sinner's guilt or teach him how he may become God-like.

And have we such a gospel, such a theology, for our time? Thank God we have one which, when faithfully applied, will humble man's pride and self-glory, by showing that the foolishness of God in the revelation of his Son is wiser than all the philosophies of men; and that the weakness of God, through his supernatural grace, is stronger to raise and hold up the fallen and earth-prone sons of Adam than all human machinery and combinations of machinery ever devised and applied to effect this, though aided by every form of modern science and civilization.

<sup>1</sup> See the Author's Critique of Herbert Spencer on Education, in Presbyterian and Theological Review for October 1863.

And let us know this, that as we are controlled in practical life by our opinions, and as speculative opinions become the more powerful as they assume the popular form and pervade the masses, so, if possible, we are to pre-occupy the minds of all with the truth, with God's truth; and if this be not possible, if we find false leaven infused and already working, we have then no other antidote against prevailing error than this same truth—the truth of him who is over all in the spiritual and in the natural world; besides which we need no other.

Believe me, my friends, — and here I pass to one application of our subject, — the bane of our time is not, as some carping critics would have us think, an excess of theology, but the want of it. We need surely a vital godliness; but this, in order to be healthful and vigorous, must be the outgrowth of a sound theology, of one that begins with and draws its power from a living Jehovah. All would say, we want a religion grounded in principle; but what is this after all, but to have a theology that we can everywhere trust, and that can be known, the essential features of which may be taught to our youth and children?

We need more of theology in private life for the individual. We need more of it in domestic life for the family. We need more of it in the business world to revise and control the laws of trade and to improve our political economy. Our social life needs curbing as well as first purifying by its influence. Our statesmanship needs elevating by its principles, and our politics need the scourge which the Lord of the temple has the right to use, and then to be re-adjusted by that morality which has its sanction in him who rules among the nations. Our history for the last four years shows most sadly that our civil life needs a religion grounded in a Christian theology and conformed to it.

If religion is the bond that holds all by a divine idea to the one common Father, why should not all understand this divine idea? If Christianity is to pervade the whole of life on earth, not less than the blood these earthly bodies, why should not the laws of this vital circulation be known? Nay,

should we not suspect that they who would keep us ignorant of them, would willingly inject poison into our main artery? Is there no fear, that they who would have us remain ignorant of this most sacred law of our being would do it, to have us join them in treason and rebellion against the King immortal and invisible?

Among Protestants the time is past, or ought to have been, long ago, when we should be afraid to let the truth and the common mind come in closest contact with each other. We believe the want of this is the reason why Rome still holds two hundred millions of men in spiritual bondage. And how do we hope to convert the world but by having men embrace the principles of God's truth, in which a transforming religion may be rooted and grown?

Why, even those who raise an outcry against theology and creeds, would if possible, as has been said, have the masses understand all the laws of this lower world — of nature. Why not then, if there is a higher world, a supernatural, as we fully believe, why not try to understand, and have all understand, the science of sciences — the laws of God and his moral government, which connect us so vitally with this invisible but real world? What churches to-day are most reliable, most effective for good in the community and the nation, and most abundant in missionary efforts to evangelize the heathen? And what Christians are most stable amid the eddies of infidelity, most self-denying in a luxurious age, and most wisely active for the cause of Christ, while so many schemes of reform are propounded? The very suggestive answer is: They are those churches and those individuals whose religion is thoroughly rooted in the principles of Christianity. History, in fact, declares the same to be true in every age.

And was there ever greater reason than now why every one, older or younger, should know what he believes, and why he believes it, that he may not be entangled in the subtle snares of a plausible, wide-spread scepticism? And yet I fear we do not sow seeds of truth enough and thick enough



to choke down the seeds of error now so thickly sown ; that we have not enough of theology to keep out neology and infidelity.

I pass to a further application of the subject before us. If the masses need it, how much more do their leaders and teachers need a profound and comprehensive theology !

I know we should have a theology that may be practical and affect the life ; but has not one of our faults as ministers been to allow ourselves to be too much influenced by the popular notion of the practical, as if it meant only the outside life of men, and nothing more ; while, in fact, religion has to do with the invisible above us, and with our inner and spiritual life ; and yet is there anything practical in so wide a sense as this ? Those who teach error take advantage of our folly in this respect, proposing to satisfy a deeper than the merely superficial want ; not by any means that they really can do it, while the deep things of God that we claim to handle can satisfy man's deepest want. And we are not to lose sight of the fact that the great need — not the popular demand, till this is in the right way developed — but the need of our time is a profound as well as practical, or more strictly speaking, a profoundly practical theology. Milton sings :

“ How charming is divine philosophy ;  
Not harsh and crabbed as dull fools suppose,  
But musical as is Apollo's lute,  
And a perpetual feast of nectareal sweets,  
Where no crude surfeit reigns.”

We, leaving out the philosophy, try then to satisfy ourselves with the poetry, which with us has, after all, very little of the divine in it.

Now if the great battle of the church is preparing, and is to be fought with the manifold forms of infidelity, the church must be prepared to meet it. But how shall she be prepared, if not through her ministers, at once her teachers and leaders ? They must qualify for captains and colonels and generals in the army, and should know the enemy's battle-ground and mode of attack. They must not only be willing to march

with their forces to "the front," but know how to do it wisely; while they ought to, and can, if wisely bold, do it in full confidence of success, since all the divisions and subdivisions of the foe are southern rebels and traitors against a just cause, and weak by being in the wrong.

Our ministers need to appreciate and so be prepared to meet the subtle but manifold and growing infidel tendency of our times, whether it most appears on the continent of Europe, in England, or in the United States, — for its influence is not confined to nation or continent, — be prepared to meet it with a full and living theology, which, like Moses's rod, shall swallow up all the rods of the magicians. In order to this they must have more than separate truths and their appropriate proof texts. To be sure, the parts of the system are to be known, and the sword of the Spirit in the hands of Christ's ambassadors must be kept keen and bright, and be well applied in the very words of him out of whose mouth it proceeds. But the whole system of divine truth, well-adjusted, will be needed for the modern style of offensive assault which the enemy is choosing to adopt.

We should be aware of this also, that the dangerous errors of the present time root themselves in a false philosophy before they appear as an infidel theology. There is much in the saying of Sir William Hamilton: "We have to encounter no difficulty in theology which has not already appeared in philosophy." If this be so, shall we not say that the coming ministry need to unite a true philosophy with a true theology; the first to give method, the second furnishing the matter revealed by God which must fill the system and unify the method? Our work as ministers is indeed twofold; first, to know the truth ourselves, and this in opposition to error; and secondly, so to use it as to keep our people from error and in the truth.

We know that Christianity cannot prove a failure, but will accomplish its divinely appointed work on earth. But shall we allow this assurance to be the occasion of carelessness in regard to the success of our cause? Should it not rather,

while an interest of such magnitude is committed to us, inspire us with greater courage and an intelligent purpose to gain the victory in behalf of our Emmanuel ?

Very suggestive are the words of Guizot, uttered in Paris in 1864 : "The assault on the bases of the Christian faith is made everywhere, in Germany, in Switzerland, in Holland, in England, in France," and he might have added in America. "People say they are not afraid ; neither am I, provided that the defense answer to the attack ; provided that believers remain not inert and indolent in the presence of unbelievers who are ardent and active. I have full confidence in the Christian cause ; but men are the instruments of God. It was through the faith and labor of the first Christians that God founded the Christian religion ; it is by the faith and labor of Christians now that that religion should be defended. We have before us a great crisis and a great work, greater, indeed, than we can appreciate."

Let, then, the young men, our future ministry, look well to their preparation for the work which the Master is preparing for them, and into which they must soon enter. It is evident they cannot know the truth of God without being thoroughly in sympathy with Christ. To know divine things, as Pascal says, we must love them. To meet their responsibility, they need not less, but more, of the transforming, all-inspiring life of Christ. But having this, they must seek to know the law of Christianity also. Then, with full confidence in a supernatural religion, a divine gospel, and a Christian theology, they need not fear the foe, however bold and daring he may become ; for they shall know how to meet him in every form, in every change of base or change of front.

If, then, we surely have a Christianity, we have a distinctive church history ; let us vindicate it as such, and be instructed by it. If we have a Bible, the inspired word of God, in which this Christianity is revealed as the light and life of men, let us have for it the best interpreters. If we have a theology, let us put it into a system that shall agree with man's moral constitution, God's character, and his revealed

word. If we have a gospel to preach, let us do what we can to fit young men for their high duties. And for this end and the attainment of this desirable object, let our seminaries of sacred learning still stand; and let the instruction which they give be adapted to the wants of our times, and of those who must bear so important a part in moulding the next generation, and in giving character to the church of the coming age.

And let those who have consecrated their best energies as our instructors in the things of God be accounted worthy of double honor; and when after their long and successful day of toil they fall asleep, may their sky, and that of the church whose interests they have served, be cloudless, and irradiated by the beams of divine love.

Finally, — if I may be pardoned for a word more personal to myself, — I am well aware that to the double responsibility of the minister, there is added on the part of the theological professor that of “teaching the teachers.” And if, to use the apostle’s expression, “I magnify mine office,” I do at the same time, and by doing it, magnify my responsibility in attempting to fill it. Nor yet should this magnifying be for the office sake or his who fills it, but for the truth’s sake, which in itself and in its bearings is an endless study, and in which we must all alike be ever learners, with the consciousness that the bounds are not reached, and cannot be reached till we see as we are seen and know as we are known.

With earnest, devout study, and a steady purpose applied on my part to this congenial but arduous task, I shall need, as I ask, your forbearance, your sympathies, and, above all, your prayers; that in attempting to teach divine truth, the enlightening Spirit, who knows all the laws of life and of a life-giving theology, may instruct me; that by him I may be guided and assisted in the responsible work to which, through you, and in the providence of God, I am now called.