

ARTICLE III.

METHOD OF THE THEOLOGICAL USE OF THE BIBLE,
ESPECIALLY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.¹

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MUCH of the cloud that hangs around the so-called conflict of religion and science would be cleared off by attention to the fact that a religion is a series of phenomena, and therefore there may be a science thereof. For one has defined science to be a systematized knowledge, and therein the definer has done well. He has thus put forward a commonly used sense of the word as the one best fit to be used, and thereby has also chosen a meaning which accords with the etymology of the word, and which also exactly translates the only actually used sense of certain words of exactly analogous etymology in other modern languages. Compare *wissenschaft* and *la science*. The value of a word is great, if it will exactly render the meaning of these terms so often met in works which need to be translated for scientific purposes. Again, although science is very often used alone when men mean only natural science and physical science, yet this misfortune does not affect the adjectives and adverbs derived from science, viz. scientific, etc.

I shall not hesitate to urge this use of the word by using it strictly in this essay. There is a possibility of arranging all the observed religious phenomena of facts, and the systematized knowledge of these is the science of religion. Not that religion is a science; but the systematized knowledge thereof is, viz. theology is. Theology is the systematized knowledge of religion. I need not stay to comment on the folly of such as presume to deal with religious things, and

¹ Read before a Philosophical Society in Montreal, Feb. 6, 1877.

yet laugh at theology, that is, laugh at knowledge of what they presume to deal with; nor yet at writers who say theology is effete, and yet, *in ipso facto*, discuss knowledge of religious things. Now there must be rigid investigation of all that claims to be religious fact. This is exactly the business of a theologian. It is by no means a conflict against him. Nor yet is it a conflict with religion. It certainly is a conflict against everything which claims to be religion, but which really is not religion. It is therefore a conflict for religion. All that claims to be religion must be observed, recorded, classified. It must be thus decided whether there be anything religious at all in the world; and if there be, this must be mapped clearly; that is, religion must be defined. Then only can the truly religious element in us be well cared for. But this study of what religion is, is not the special work which a Christian theologian has to do. It is the work of a wider, a more preliminary investigator. That general science of religion in general, usually styled "the philosophy of religion," finishes its work, its definition, its answer to the question: "What is religion?" What is common to every one who has ever claimed to have a religion? What is thus common and really deserving of the name? Here the work of Christian theology begins. It must tell us accurately what Christianity is. No science need be more rigidly accurate in its statement of what the actual facts are. Here I may add, then, that actual facts cannot be essentially inconsistent with other actual facts, unless there be more than one independent source of facts in the universe. Please note that the belief in the conflict alluded to between one set of facts and another is virtually polytheism. Again, as the facts cannot conflict, so neither can accurate sciences thereof. For my purpose of an accurate knowledge of any one part of Christianity, I may assume, without discussion here, a definition of religion. I take one which I think will be the result of a careful philosophy of religion, but whose discussion I must refer to that field. Religion I take to be the relation of the soul to God in respect of its feeling. I might have

worded this, "the relation of the soul to the Spirit which is the First Cause of all things, in respect of feeling." I mean this: The proof that there is a First Cause which is a Spirit is a part of the philosophy of religion; it is no part of Christian theology. The Christian theologian's duty is to investigate and formulate that relation of the soul to God in respect of feeling which exists in a Christian. Take for an illustration of the appearance of this fact in practice, that the distinctive effort which is made by Jesus, or by any preacher of Christianity, in order to lead a pagan or a Jew to Christ, is, "You think so and so of God. I bring you such and such a message about God." Belief in God is common ground.

Again, it may be laid down as a principle that Christianity is that which is the religion of all Christians. This must guide our investigation, rather than an axiom like this: Christianity is to be seen completely in Christ; therefore theology is study of Christ alone. For even were attempt made to follow this latter principle in order to answer the question, What is Christianity? there would necessarily be at once an appeal to subjective evidence, i.e. to the question, What does the investigator think that Christ was? And farther on, but not much farther, would arise the question, What did certain witnesses of Christ's life think that he was? True, this would be met by some who bear the Christian name with the reply, These witnesses were infallibly correct in their testimony. Still, those who thus argue would yield that the testimony of the witnesses was not absolutely uninfluenced by the subjective nature of the witness. To counterbalance this there must be at least a careful comparison of all the various testimonies, which are differently influenced by the different subjective natures. Even if now it be asserted that these, being compared, give an absolutely correct result, and no other testimony could at all supplement the report, yet the comparer has a subjective character, which must influence his work. For the work is not that of a mathematical science, where results are abso-

lutely exact ; but it is that of an experimental science, where there may be improvement forever in observation. In any case, we must recur to the axiom which I have advanced ; and this is confirmed by the consideration that all science of the soul — knowledge of what it is — all psychology — must start with the question, What am I myself ? I wish to know what soul is in any respect. Then what am I in that respect ; for I myself am the first soul I know. I am a Christian in my religion. Then, in order to describe clearly what Christianity is, I must begin by analyzing clearly what I am religiously. Here I must begin, but only begin ; for if others are Christians too, then Christianity is that religion which is common to all of us. There must, therefore, be a historical record made, and an induction therefrom. Thus far theology would be a historical science. We have to add that there was one whose religion was accepted by all who take the name Christian. He, the Founder, Christ, was the Christian *κατ' ἐξοχήν*. To know his religion accurately is our object in the above induction. The better we know it, the more surely can we correct our other results. There are reports of what he was, prepared by persons who lived with him or near him. These may certainly well be called the Christian classics ; and since the second century ended Christians have certainly wisely agreed, although the agreement has been a tacit one, to place these records on the desk of every pulpit as the only or the best representatives of what was at the first declared to be the account concerning Jesus. It has been a tacit agreement, and thus a natural one, a fit one, one not unlike the actual nature of things. They are the story concerning Christ which made us Christians ; for they made, or they legitimately represent what made, those Christians who, teaching the generation following them, ultimately made us Christians. They and the other similar documents composing the New Testament are what we possess of those proclamations and arguments and counsels which first gathered together others, and so at length gathered us, to enter the brotherhood, the *ἐκκλησία*, the church which our Lord, our

Master gathered. Therefore they lie on our pulpits, the text of the preaching there, and are in the homes of Christianity, by their use at devotion, the text-book of the religious instruction of our children. They are worthy, as few utterances are worthy, to be in our hands at times of devotion to suggest thought on our relation to God. I think I have thus defined all that is legitimately meant by the term "the sacred canon."

The theological use of the New Testament is thus the use of it to obtain a knowledge of what was the religion which of Jesus preached; this to be done, viz. by a careful analysis what certain men were religiously who were followers of him, and who have left certain sermons and counsels written for the purpose of leading others to the religion of Jesus. What they were religiously is to be used in our induction of what all Christians are. Moreover, these sermons particularly are accounts which the writers or others of the first followers preached of Christ, gave concerning him in the manner of preaching. "They preached Christ." Here, then, is the nearest view we have of Jesus himself as he lived. From a careful study of what there is in these reports which is purely objective (no easy work), we must get such a picture of him as is possible with which to correct all our other study. Apparently the picture will be fragmentary, and will therefore need correction from the results of our other study. If we had a scientific statement written by himself of his religion, or even a report written by himself of his own life and preaching, we could from this last formulate, ourselves, a scientific statement of the relation he teaches and brings between his followers and God; and this formula we could then develop as it is applied to all points in our relations to him and to one another, ethical, as well as purely religious. I might say we have no such report. But here I should be met by a danger of wounding the feeling of sacredness with which many Christians regard the records concerning Jesus. A feeling of sacredness is a religious feeling. I may be doing violence to an organism whose normal, unex-

cited operation I wish to observe. Do you say, only a few Christians will check you? That is enough. I may disregard no one in my present quest, except in such points as I have clearly shown to be different essentially in their persons from the essential principle of Christianity. Now we are sure of following a method which agrees with the essential nature of Christianity only if we know that nature, and then deduce our method from it. But here we are requiring at the outset that which is the ultimate object of all our work. And yet this is only what must be in every experimental science. There is really a beginning in the circle which we seem bound to travel. Let us remember that we call ourselves Christians, and believe we are such. The method, then, which a faithful Christian judgment naturally follows will be the right one, if we only follow it out faithfully, that is, constantly correct it by comparison with the other sources of knowledge. This is equivalent to saying: The Spirit which knoweth and doeth all things well is given to a Christian, and will lead his judgment aright if he will only compare himself with others whom that Spirit is as certainly guiding. Taking, then, what we can get by a brief sketch of the Christian nature as seen in any Christian, and correcting this by comparison with a like observation of statements of Christian faith throughout the history of Christianity, and also by a brief consideration of a few prominent parts of Christ's preaching, let us endeavor to formulate such a rule for handling the Christian records as will be a rigid deduction from the central principle of this religion, a rule which is in strict accordance therewith.

To take the first of these three considerations, I think the exact statement of what a Christian finds in him as his relation to God is the following: that the Spirit which causes all things loves him. He believes that although he has sinned, yet he need not, does not, live in constant dread of that Spirit whom sin offends. The relation to God is one of confidence, absence of slavish fear, love. This is the same as saying a Christian believes that the Spirit who has pro-

duced him, and all the faculties in him, delights in seeing him in the full exercise of all these faculties, — his feelings, his judgment, his reason, — so long as these act so as to afford just as full play to all the other beings whom the Creating Spirit has produced, and whom he loves likewise. We believe that that Spirit is good, and does produce in all things that which is good and which he loves. But more, those who love him also see good in all, and rejoice; and they are sure that whatever results from the faithful exercise of the powers he has lovingly and wisely given them will be good, will be pleasing to him. Thus they know that rational action is his delight and their duty. Is this, however, confirmed to be Christian duty by a survey of the other sources of knowledge of Christianity?

Let me now take, first, some prominent instances of Christ's preaching, then of that of his immediate followers, then trace the doctrine of the great Confessions. But I do so briefly, barely so far as will direct us in handling biblical records, and treating the sacredness of these in a strictly Christian manner. Turning to the briefest Gospel, viz. Mark's (which is probably the most exact), i. 14 says his preaching was, "The kingdom of God is at hand," i.e. that which men desired as a time of peculiar happiness, as contrasted with the yoke of the Romans, was coming. This is the same as what we say above. And thus God was going to be the source of joy. God would be to them not one to be feared, but the source of joy, of just the joy they naturally wished. He took pleasure in giving them pleasure. Not that he would really begin to control things, any more than he had done before; but those who obeyed the laws of righteousness which he had put in their souls would see his rule. It would come to their sight. They would see God to be one altogether worthy of love, of confidence. This was the relation preached. Go on farther, Mk. ii. 5 says, Jesus even preached "Sin is forgiven," in certain cases; i.e. God bids those who will love him trust that he loves them enough to forget all their wrong-doing, and bids them trust he loves them, in

spite of all temptations to think he cannot do so. He bids them go forward, forgetting the wrong past, i.e. he bids them do henceforth whatsoever they find to do. Again, Jesus did good to all. This must have been agreeable to God's will. Again, his principle of conduct will be seen in his acting according to a careful judgment of what was needed, even when that went directly opposite to any traditional religious observance. Compare his conduct respecting the Sabbath, etc. In fact, this last shows that constant scrutiny of the Mosaic, the traditionally religious, and adherence only to what stands the test of the fitness of things was Christ's central principle of conduct in the treatment of religious records.

Let us briefly point to the great Confessions, and see whether they in principle agree with this. The so-called Apostles' Creed, already in existence and long known in the fourth century (cf. Rufinus) as a record of Christian doctrine, has one section in which it treats of the relation proper of the Christian to God. Its words there are: "I believe in the forgiveness of sin." The essential meaning of this I have discussed. The Niceno-Constantinopolitan (325-381), the Ephesian (431), and Chalcedonian Symbols give this expression unaltered. So does the so-called Athanasian — a semi-dogmatic product of the Christianity of the far west, from about the end of the fifth century. I pass the Greek church, which has really made no effort at doctrinal life later than the symbols quoted. The Roman communion certainly denies the doctrine thus traced, if we consult her standard Confession, that of the Council of Trent. But it is remarkable that her liturgies are often exactly words of Jesus, e.g. the Lord's prayer, or the like; or they are the early symbols above quoted; or they are expressions so like these — in act, so Protestant, if you will — that they are gladly used by all Protestant worshippers. And, strangely enough, in one part of South Germany it is a common saying that every Romanist becomes a Protestant on his death-bed, by an act of the priest, who administers to the departing soul a

form of confession which is strictly Protestant or Pauline, if we do not say, strictly Christian. Indeed, it seems very probable that the reason why vast numbers of Romanists do not rebel against church leaders who hold that none but priests may investigate Scripture freely, or otherwise deal with sacred things,—i.e. approach God *in propria persona*,—is, that while the Tridentinum is the doctrine of the clergy, the laity know nothing of it, and so never think of anything wrong in it. Their confession of faith is contained in the liturgies, and is often admirably true to the wants of the soul and to Jesus, and they think of no reason for leaving it. It is often the doctrinal opposite of the Confession of Trent.

I pass the faith of the hidden saints of the dark ages; for the Reformation was really largely their work. The great Augsburg Confession—the Lutheran statement of Christianity—says, in the sections important to us (see it in any copy of Luther's works; cf. the section concerning Monks and the Essence of Christianity): "Christian perfection [i.e. perfect Christianity) consists in the fear of God and in faith grounded on Christ that God is gracious to us, in prayer to God, in the sure expectation of his help in all our undertakings in our calling, as well as in diligence in good works in the service of our calling." This means that if it be a man's calling to study the Bible, and so serve men and God, that man will be a perfect Christian if he do it unhesitatingly, never shrinking from truth, and believing that even although some men may count it too sacred to be handled as unsparingly as we handle any other ancient record, yet God will not harm him; nay, he must expect God's sure help. An unseen hand will help him to come to the most valuable result. Let me say that all Methodist Christians, being almost direct descendants of Lutheranism, are here of the same mind, as may also be seen in their strong assertion of human freedom. John Calvin, in his *Institutio*,¹ teaches the same, viz. supreme regard of all God's self and work, including ourselves (that is, including our powers of judgment, our

¹ Instruction concerning Religion. Geneva, 1559; especially Bk. iii. cc. 6, 7.

reason), as the sum of Christianity. The Westminster Confession of Faith (of 1643), in its chapters on the Holy Scriptures, shows clearly the spirit which guided the writers, although at times their words contradict it. It teaches that just as God is the origin of these writings, so is he with us, that "we should use the ordinary means" for the understanding of the Scriptures, even on some points deciding what is Christian duty without reference to the Scriptures. This statement is confirmed by the deliverance of the committee appointed by the proper representative authorities of the Free Church of Scotland to consider the Article "Bible" in the new edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica. The author, W. Robertson Smith, is Professor of Old Testament Theology in the Free Church Theological College in Aberdeen. His Article follows the rule I am deducing, and fearlessly expresses his own opinion and those of others who are most thoroughly trained in philological and theological scholarship in Britain, Europe, and Germany. For example, he has no hesitation in assigning the date of the preparation of our Book of Genesis to a point certainly not earlier than David, B.C. 1055, — i.e. say, three hundred years later than the emigration from Egypt, — putting its date possibly very much later, even the period of the exile. But this is but one of a multitude of illustrations, and of this more farther on. The committee publish in the church prints their report that Professor Smith's views are not heretical — not inconsistent with orthodoxy. Some of the members of the committee — viz. leading men in the body — call loudly for a more thorough exoneration, and a hearty recommendation of Professor Smith's work. True, some others murmur. I will not press an investigation whether these latter are not *a priori* the less scholarly men, but will consider their claim presently.

Again, the Confessions of the Church of England, and of all other Episcopal churches, reaffirm various of the expressions above quoted. So also do their liturgies. So also does the theological writing of a large part of the leading scholars

in these communions. Congregational churches, including Baptists and Unitarians, agree generally in their confessions in emphasizing such opinions concerning duty towards Scripture, and, in addition, doubly emphasize the sufficiency of the presence of God's Spirit in each Christian, giving each one ability and right to judge on all religious and moral questions, even the most sacred. Witness their government and their admission to fellowship. I need bring up no more testimony.¹ All these agree that the Christian religion is the relation of loving trustfulness toward God as one who is love to us. The consequent rule of action, even toward sacred documents, is that we deal with most careful judgment, aiming at the exact truth, with no prejudice as respects any point of investigation. Careful judging and most rigid exacting of the truth is the richest love.

But, now, does this rule conflict with the feeling and opinion of many who hesitate to follow it, and who reiterate: This book is the inspired and sacred Scriptures. Let us accurately express this feeling and opinion. The following series of statement seems to do so fully. Their affirmation means:

1. In these writings we find the way which Jesus brought. Our rule for careful study and search for the exact truth is thus demanded.

2. We may use these writings, or parts of them, as peculiarly fit means to devotion and edification. This implies the first statement, and again demands our rule.

3. Sacredness, meaning preciousness to God, demands like preciousness in our sight, and therefore such handling, such search for the exact truth, as will be loving, honest faithfulness. Moreover, no sacredness of the books can exist which would require violation of the sacredness of the souls which God has put in us. The sacredness of the powers he

¹ Here notice that I have quoted these passages and confessions simply as records of the religion of the men who wrote them, and of the probable religion of the whole age when they were written. They are authorities *only* in this sense.

has created in us would be violated by refusal to accept the results of careful, strict judgment, here as anywhere else.

4. The feeling which we find still holding many back is inherited through our training from many generations of Christians, for seventeen hundred years past, since Christians began to collect these writings, i.e. since A.D. 100; and it grew up gradually in all these Christians from their opinion of the origin and character of these writings. But these Christians, their powers of judgment, their opinion were not more precious to God than are we — not more precious than the natural demand which we find has been created by God within us for a careful weighing of these men's opinions.

5. The statements of many documents and persons that the writers of the sacred Scriptures were "inspired and infallible" are very inexact. Take, as a notable specimen, those of the Westminster Confession, which historically and by reference, as a confession, is a sort of joint property of nearly all English Christians save Methodists. The predicates "inspired" and "infallible" are affirmed again and again, without any statement of the meaning thereof. They are used also alongside of references to the soul of the Christian as the seat whence issues every authoritative declaration of the worth of the Scriptures. When we do find careful definitions given, — for example, this: By the inspiration of the writers of Scripture we mean that the writers were led by the hand of God to teach truth in the best possible way, not necessarily to give accurate historical reports, but especially to convey the essence of the message which Christ brought, — we find the rule above deduced to be directly demanded, in order that from the reports we may find exactly the essence. But, moreover, it is the central teaching of Christianity, as shown above, that God, the Spirit which alone causes everything in every man, loves each, and guides him so that the man will please God, i.e. certainly guides him to do his work in the best possible way. The faithful, loving, unswerving biblical critic will then be guided to results which God will delight in, which are right, as surely

as the writers were guided. The definition of "inspired," quoted above, includes, then, the faithful student too. We do not care to use the term. Conflict has arisen between some strong assertors of the sacredness of the writings and strong assertors of our rule, through neglect by either to define sacredness and the rule, and adhere faithfully, lovingly to each.

Leaving, now, this rule for treatment of any sacred documents, let us consider a few facts of importance respecting the Gospels, and then at more length the method of use of the Old Testament books.

Suppose that by textual criticism we have got the text as it was left, say about 100 A.D., by men who had listened much to the preaching of companions of our Lord, or had listened somewhat to his own preaching. Suppose, then, that by farther literary criticism we have decided what was actually preached as the story concerning Christ by those who went everywhere with him. We have much to do before we know from this accurately how he preached and lived. For those who heard and saw and followed him were inspired with a new principle and aim in life, if Christianity meant anything. So their whole life, their conduct, was changed. Their whole thought was changed. They saw him now very differently from the way in which they saw him before. Again, they certainly did not view him as reporters would, or writers of journals, certainly not as writers of history for us. Their object each day was to see him, to feed again on him. The day before was forgotten, almost as much as is the food of yesterday by a child to-day. He was all to each of them; but that all meant, in any one case, all that that individual needed. He was no more to any one. That much, and that only, was the idea concerning Jesus which each one carried away, and which sank into his consciousness, into his memory, of the character and the teaching of Jesus. Each one's impression of the religion of Jesus was a view of one side. We may certainly not affirm that from the few pictures which a few have given us a complete picture can

be constructed. What I have said concerning their thorough occupation of mind with following him, to utter neglect of reporting, is no fancy; for but one Gospel of three giving a narrative of his life claims to be the work of one of the twelve, and what we now have of it is very certainly a considerably altered edition of the original. The fourth Gospel, whose apostolic author took the best means to conceal his identity, is no report at all, but a series of sermons on Jesus, giving systematically the writer's own mode of regarding him. This is the case, even granting that where it does report Christ's actual work it does so at least as accurately as the three other very different Gospels. Ten of the twelve intimate followers give us no report like Matthew's. Seven of them have entirely disappeared, with no record or letter, or report of such by the others, or by anybody whose word is worth anything. Two others, even the apparently prominent Peter and James, have left us extremely little that might show what Jesus seemed to them to be. But notice, now, that these things only exalt the Lord far above other men. Few men comprehended him; very few did so enough to commit the story to writing in such shape that others prized it and preserved it. More, his influence was indeed one thoroughly changing the men who heard and followed him. Had he been a mere wonder-worker, they would have found time and strong inclination to talk about him incessantly. He was talked about; but it was with very little of the style of the curiosity reporter, rather with the deep seriousness of concern for some unseen things which the Samaritan woman betrayed, when she said: "Come. Is not this the Christ?" What Christ was is not contained in anything but in the religion which those whom he influenced were found to possess years afterwards. The late fourth Gospel is thus less a report, but a better illustration, of Christianity than are the earlier three.

Consider again, now, the period when the writings began to be made. The first followers had begun to be very different from what they were before—very different from

others about them. The same spirit being in them which moved their Master to seek to bring the life of God to men moved them to preach the kingdom of God, as we have said above. It was very natural that writing should be used to aid in this. But their work certainly would be to preach what Jesus was to them; and, moreover, he was now to them as somewhat experienced Christians not what he had been to them as hearers at the first. That they preached him as he was to them at the time of writing is evident from the fourth Gospel, and is even more evident from the writings of him who had never followed Jesus on earth, and who even boasts that he never learned from eye-witnesses; but his view of Christ was entirely that which was suited to his own subjective nature, the fruit of the Spirit of God working in his (Paul's) private reflection. All the peculiarities of a Jewish mind, educated in the schools of the rabbis after their peculiar style of theology and philosophy, were there. It was quite natural that he should impress on his preaching features quite different from that of John, and, for example, that the Old Jewish doctrine of predestination should pervade all his Christianity, as it did his whole training and thought. These remarks all tend to show that the fit method of theological use of the New Testament is not to search for words and sentences as proof-texts to be arrayed or to be explained, but is rather to construct carefully the religious thought of each writer on the system peculiar to himself, then to eliminate from this all coloring which is clearly a peculiarity of his own, and accurately to discover wherein these men's religion was different from that of themselves before, or from that of their forefathers and teachers, as well as from that of all other religious men about them. And thus is directly introduced the consideration of the use of the Old Testament.¹

In addition to the argument thus adduced for a thorough

¹ I am indebted for much food of thought to a treatise by a teacher whose character and whose exact scholarship in Semitic Philology and in Theology, as well as in all collateral provinces, I cannot value too highly, Professor Paul de Lagarde of the Georgia Augusta University, Göttingen. The particular treatise referred to is Ueber d. Verhältniss der d. Staates zur Theol. k. u. Religion.

knowledge of the Jewish religion previous to Jesus, and therefore a thorough knowledge of the Old Testament, let me say that could we know what the actual preaching of Jesus was we could understand it thoroughly only if we knew thoroughly the circumstances which called it forth. Given a specific concrete instruction. Tell us all the circumstances; tell us what state or conduct called it forth; and then we can find out the general principle of which that other is a modification suited to these circumstances. These circumstances we must know thoroughly if we will understand the preaching of Jesus himself or of his followers, i.e. the actual contents of the New Testament.¹ Further, a correct knowledge of Jesus as a religious leader implies knowledge of his own religious training. We must be sure whether it were possible for him to deduce what ever seems new, as any other man might, from what he had been taught. Was it really essentially new, a revelation, or was it not? In any case, in what sense was it so, or in what sense was it not so?

Some of the books of the Old Testament were the sacred writings of the Jews at the time of Jesus. We have them, I may note, among ours, because many of the first Christians being Jews, or much influenced by Jews, naturally revered them. We Protestants reject the so-called Apocryphal books, while the Vulgate of the Roman Catholic church contains them, almost solely because these belonged only to the collection used by the Greek-speaking Jews in a foreign country. The emigrants were, like Americans, given to widening the lists of such things. Now, the Vulgate was made from this Greek Bible, because Hebrew was a hard language. But when men began in Reformation times to clear away what they called Roman rubbish they cleared away from general use very useful books, simply because they found that they were not in the Bible of the Hebrew Jews. The Hebrew Jews were at a disadvantage, and so are we. But it is re-

¹ It may be remarked here, by the way, that to understand what Jesus and his followers said, Aramaic must be mastered. Greek is insufficient. Much that is said in Greek in the New Testament could never have been said or thought in Aramaic. Either this, or we must work at second-hand.

markable how little sign there is that in New Testament times anything more than the Pentateuch was much revered. The prophets were also revered, but somewhat less. Paul, educated by rabbis, uses both collections a good deal, and does so in the wonderfully allegorizing manner of the rabbis. But the Hagiographa are seldom named as a collection; and writings are quoted with as much reverence which did not belong to the Hebrew, and scarcely to the Greek, Old Testament. There is some material for the history of the Jews to be found outside of the Old Testament, but not much. We may say there is nearly none for their religious history elsewhere.

What method of use of the Old Testament books will give correctly the religious history of the people? Clearly the reports of actual preaching, the sermons written by the preachers themselves at dates which we certainly know, will give a very true picture of the religious features at successive times. The chronology of the leading civil events can be very certainly traced from a point somewhat earlier than the appearance of the first of these preachers, viz. Amos (B.C. 800); and thence we can follow it down through the times of all the remaining preachers to A.D. 1. We have abundant means of corroborating or correcting it from the written history of other peoples. More, we can trace in this way very accurately the civil history from David's time, when many scattered principalities became one, and whence date the series of events which produced these written sermons. These recorded preachings are not reports by onlookers, given us at second-hand, from which we must sift the actual occurrences; but they are the events themselves—the actual religious phenomena. Fortunately we have a succession of them very full and long. Let me merely name them by periods.

In earlier pre-exilic times of the kingdoms: Amos (810–782), Hosea (810–727), Zechariah (750–740), Isaiah (760–710), Micah (750–700), in the time of the Assyrian invasions.

Later pre-exilic, in the time of the Chaldean invasions:

Nahum (ca. 650), Zephaniah (ca. 625), Jeremiah (625-575), Habakkuk (ca. 600).

During the exile: Ezekiel (594 onwards), Isaiah II. (540). (Exile 586-536.)

After the exile: Haggai and Zechariah II. (ca. 521). (Joel is perhaps of ca. 500, Obadiah perhaps of ca. 580; Jonah is a pseudepigraph of about 300 to 400 B.C.; Daniel another from perhaps B.C. 200).

We have, then, a good many monuments of the period down to A.D. 1 in various books of the Hagiographa and the Apocrypha. The sermons preached by these men were fruits of the age; for the preachers were such. Thus we have the religious history of the people, as well as that of the preachers. Of course the sermons reflect clearly, often very vividly, the religious condition of the persons to whom they were preached. So must every concrete accusation of sin, or counsel for comfort, or direction for conduct. Sermons are not preached about the abstract. Now, if a thorough acquaintance with the times makes it clear that the speaker, although a child of his period, — i.e. the result of his training, — brought to the people some things which he could not get from his training, but from very close communion in his soul with Eternal Truth, then we have what deserves the name of a revelation. If it so please the Spirit which causes all things, to cause some men to meditate so purely on the facts about them as to see the true relations of things, the right and wrong of things, and to be filled with a confidence just and strong concerning rightness and wrongness, there will be nothing unnatural in this. And it is perfectly natural that such men open their sermons with, "Thus saith our God." Sometimes such a man may rise so far above his time in his insight that he may well be declared to have had a new revelation. I must not here try to say what will be the contents of a history of the religious thought of these preachers. I need scarcely say that it will exhibit a marked progress. I will not now call much attention to the marked degeneracy in the later periods towards mere repetition and

formalism, and then the development of this towards the doctrines of the teachers at the time of Christ's advent. But let me say that there is a period of great pristine vigor, of which the first Isaiah (750 B.C.) is a remarkable illustration, which blooms on into rich meditative poetry of thought, and rises into peculiar sublimity of religious conception in the writer of Isa. liii. (550). Towards the end of the exile he actually conceives of an Ideal people existing in the actual people, although not at all visibly distinguishable from these. And this Ideal people suffers for the redemption of the people. Here is exactly the idea of Christ's church as preached by John and Paul, and doubtless by Christ himself, except that there is no one head, as Jesus was. I have drawn out this illustration to emphasize this proposition, that if all that Jesus brought had been brought before, then Christian would be an empty name. I repeat, the method of the theological use of the Bible is to construct accurately, scientifically, the contents of religious life and thought of the writers of the *New Testament*, then the history of such life and thought in the *Old Testament*, and to point out the difference. If they are different, Jesus brought something.

The Hagiographa, so far as dates are certain, are of use like the sermons. Uncertainty of date is the cloud about most of the historical books. If the dates of composition could be found, then, although the writers proved to be strong religious or political partisans, and not good historians, yet they would be all the better as monuments of what sort of religion existed in them. We could also eliminate the history, i.e. narrative of the actual events which they enlarge or contract as they are eager to have them seen or not. An illustration may be noted of this method in the great space devoted to Elijah and Elisha in the Book of Kings, while many another man is almost passed over. The history might just there be shorter; but it is a clear evidence of the religious character of the writer. But how shall the dates be found? The books give almost none. The difficulty is increased by Semitic historians; for it is their custom to compose a book

by transcribing passages of various previous books. This is and was the custom. The Arab histories are so written. Let me remind you that so were the Gospels, as the breaks and the beginnings of new sections show. So were the books of Chronicles, Kings, and the Pentateuch. A knowledge of Hebrew is scarcely necessary in order to see this in Gen. i. and ii. Here and there the author of a section is named by the writer; but the writer's exact historical accuracy must be weighed. Sometimes the nature of a section shows what external conditions must have prevailed about the author; but it is often a very delicate task to determine this, and, again, alike difficult to point out the period when the conditions existed to such an extent as to make us certain that such a passage must have arisen in such and such a period. A great deal of the reasoning in this field goes in a circle. A fruitful line of study has been much pursued in the past twelve years. The probability is not small that formalism is a growth among men who have inherited a rich legacy of vigorous religious teaching which has at last moulded a whole people. Only a few men lead independently at any time towards progress in thought. Multitudes are too content, are too busy, to do their own thinking. They accept that of others. What is worthy becomes widely honored; if it be religiously worthy it becomes sacred. Later it takes on forms, which share its sacredness. Illustrations are supplied by every religion. Such, it is held, may have been the order of rise of the sacerdotal system after that vigor was past which we see in the earliest prophets named above. The story of the rise of the religion, as something very venerable, is quite probably co-ordinate in time of construction with the construction of the formal cultus. This beginning may consist in compilation from records previously written. But it is evident that the work of unravelling the whole is in any case complicated, and needs the concurrent work for many years of the most skilful specialists, masters of the special departments of study involved. Of all the lines of investigation which will throw light here the first in impor-

tance is the philological. Until a man is as familiar with the language of the documents as a student of English literature with us is with his mother-tongue, differences between Gen. i. and ii. may be like the differences between Chaucer and Tennyson; but they will be unnoted. Certainly they will not give the light they might on our problem. The history of the language must be known. The history of its relation to its sister languages must also be written. This is made more necessary by the smallness of the literature which is no advantage.¹ The list is already considerable of words used by the historical books whose origin points out the date of the books as late. But the principles of comparative philology which have been so fruitfully applied to other languages have been used on the Semitic field scarcely thirty years. Hebrew grammar is scarcely written; lexicography scarcely touched. Neither Syriac grammar nor lexicography is written. Arabic grammar is being carefully studied, and works are being published therein now; but the lexicography is far behind. Passow's Greek Lexicon makes Greek accessible like English. But Semitic philology is almost unwritten. There are now living specialists who are at home in different parts of the group. But their work is not done — far less is it written down. It is not in the hands of every amateur. I have published more full notes in the *Bibliotheca Sacra* of what I have now summed up.² This is sufficient to show that the study of the historical books is not within the grasp of beginners in the study of language. And the right field for theologians is not among the historical books, but among the preachers. Here there is not only little difficulty respecting dates; their solution in this case is not something in the future; here there is also abundant purely theological work awaiting hard workers.

I have thus sketched the more general arguments prelim-

¹ I may say that this history of the language tends to confirm the theory I have just sketched of the order of rise of various parts.

² The description of philological processes would be interesting, but it would not be the work of this *Essay*.

inary to scientific use of the Bible. Much of it may seem a great ado about little. But that is in this field very necessary. Much may seem strange. I think a few years will make such facts seem as familiar as do now facts which other sciences have in a generation past shown to be very useful, instead of fearful, as men supposed.

I append a few theses for discussion, embodying or suggesting various parts of this paper.

Theses for discussion :

1. True philosophy teaches to discover the fundamental principle wherein all Christians are one.

2. Christians are (*a*) already outwardly one in the use of a common confession of faith, that part of the Bible called the Lord's Prayer (Ritschl); (*b*) almost so in the use of the New Testament as symbol of their preaching.

3. The popular use of the term "Word of God" is very different from the use of $\delta \lambda \acute{o} \gamma \omicron \varsigma \tau \omicron \upsilon \Theta \epsilon \omicron \upsilon$ in the fourth Gospel.

4. The proper theological use of the Bible is the philosophical elimination (*a*) of the peculiar system of religious thought of each writer; (*b*) of that of the followers of Jesus as distinct from that which preceded him.

5. Semitic philology deserves more careful cultivation at our colleges than it now receives.

6. The great value of the Bible as a means to devotion must decrease if thought be diverted at time of devotion from God to the origin of that which suggests the thought; and this diversion is unnecessary.