ARTICLE V.

THE AUTHORITY AND INSPIRATION OF THE SCRIPTURES.

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THE problem of Systematic Theology is always the same. In the various ages of the church, as the introduction of new information or general acceptance of new conclusions, whether from the study of nature or of man, presents it with new material, it has the task of reducing this material to order and setting forth in a systematic manner the sum total of present knowledge upon the themes which it treats. It is always constructive, never destructive. It is not the science of exploration and discovery. It has to wait for the performance of these labors by other departments of theological thought. It may therefore often lag behind the front ranks of progress. But as soon as it can say anything which seems worthy of its special office in the church, whenever it can do anything to calm the turbulent seas of controversy, to relieve anxiety, to give new points of view, or to furnish the doctrinal material for a new advance in the practical work of the church, it is responsible for the faithful performance of these services. For them it exists.

Systematic Theology is, thus, not a stationary science, though it has sometimes been conceived as such by both friend and foe. It is not like a lawyer who has taken a brief to support a certain series of opinions, which are themselves never to be questioned or subjected to revision. The church is actually learning from age to age. New truth does appear. It may not be new in the sense that it is not con-

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tained in the Scriptures, explicitly or implicitly, or because it supersedes the doctrines of revelation; but it is new to the apprehension of the age which receives it. The true attitude of Systematic Theology is that of hospitality to it, of critical investigation of its claims, of ready acknowledgment of its reality. Not everything which professes to be true is true. Not every supposed improvement is real improvement. But by receiving increments of new truth theology is still to grow as it has grown during the Christian centuries, distinguishing between the false and the true in that which it has received by tradition, separating the helpful from the harmful in what is offered it in the present, purifying, deepening, and broadening the stream of apprehended reality.

There seems to be special occasion at the present time for the exercise of these functions of Systematic Theology. The past thirty years have seen a great change wrought in the theological thinking of America. Up to that time, what growth there had been had been homogeneous and produced under influences native, for the most part, to the soil. Since then, the influence of the critical methods of Germany, and of the revolution in the natural sciences produced by the introduction of the theory of evolution, has been increasing year by year, till we have been involved in a most momentous controversy upon the fundamental positions of Christian Theology, and particularly upon the Scriptures. At first the issues were far from clear. Time enough has now elapsed, possibly, to enable the Christian thinker to see where he is and whither he is tending. Systematic discussion has already begun, and been vigorously carried on for a considerable period. Two extreme tendencies have already become sufficiently marked: the conservative, which has nothing to learn, has always been in possession of the complete truth, and conceives its problem to be simply to stand by its guns; and the rationalistic, which adopts the evolutionary theory of the origin of our religion, and turns to comparative studies in Bud-

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dism and what not for light upon Christian doctrine. Both tendencies are utterly without promise of help,—the one, odious because of a subtile claim of infallibility permeating all its reasonings, and corrupting all its scholarship; the other, pitiable because of its ignorance of the vital and imperishable elements of Christian truth. The call of the day is for something which shall pursue the middle path, and shall perform the true work of the systematic theologian, who is ever receptive, critical, comprehensive, and constructive, who can discriminate and hold the essential elements of truth as it has proved itself such in the past, and acknowledge and incorporate into his thinking the new elements of truth which commend themselves at present.

With this problem the writer has been compelled by his official duty to wrestle and to arrive at some sort of a conclusion. The private scholar may defer judgment, and may continue indefinitely to ponder upon his themes, and to test his conclusions. The public teacher must, however, have an answer to give to those who entrust themselves to him for guidance. This necessity of his situation has both advantages and disadvantages. It certainly should make him modest in his claims for his work, and should render him peculiarly desirous of that correction which the comparison of his results with those of other thinkers is calculated to afford him.

The following pages will present the argument for the authority and inspiration of the Scriptures as it has finally shaped itself in the thinking and teaching of the writer. It is, possibly, in some respects new. It might never have been wrought out except that official duty has demanded it. If it shall seem to any to meet the necessities of the day, and to perform in any sense those services which have just been set forth as the peculiar duty of this branch of theology, it will have answered its purpose.

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I.

FUNDAMENTAL PROOF.

The Christian, in consequence of the experience of the new birth, comes to have a considerable body of knowledge springing directly out of that event. Not all parts of this are obtained in the same way. Some are matters of immediate consciousness; others are the result of inferences by longer or shorter trains of reasoning; and, while some possess all the certainty of which human knowledge is capable, others have a less degree of certainty, though they all possess enough to entitle them to the highest value as elements of original and fundamental Christian knowledge. The most important of such doctrines are, that man is a sinner, that there is a holy and personal God, that under divine influence a man may turn from sin and put forth a fundamental choice of the right as such, that thereupon he experiences peace in the forgiveness of his sins, and that he thus begins a new life, under the guidance of a new principle and with the exercise of new powers. All these truths possess to him the character of knowledge, and that, independent, experiential, knowledge. They do not depend to him upon the authority of other men, nor upon the authority of any book. If there are men who have helped him see them, or if he has derived any of his knowledge of the facts or any light upon their proper interpretation from any book, they lie now before him, when his experience has become settled and clear, as matters which he surveys in all their amplitude and in all their significance, and which he thus knows permanently and for himself.

When, now, such a man comes to the Bible, whether it be for the first or for the hundredth time, with the definite question now first definitely asked, What is the source and what the character of this book? he finds that it contains, as its central and dominating portion, the same truths as to sin, God, repentance, forgiveness, and salvation which have al-

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ready become a constituent part of his religious knowledge. He reasons thus: My knowledge of these transcendent truths was wrought within my soul by the operation of God upon it. No other agency adequately accounts for them. They are to me the utterance of God. They must have been wrought in the men who wrote this book in the same way. Therefore this book is the utterance, the Word, of God.[1]

An analogy may make this argument clearer. A student in the University learns geology. He has presented to him the fundamental facts of the science by his teacher. He also goes out into the fields and over the mountains and examines for himself the facts, and under the guidance of those more advanced in the science comes by the exercise of his own powers of observation and reasoning to an independent knowledge of the great formations, their characteristic fossils, their transformations, and the forces of water, ice, fire, etc., which have operated upon them. He becomes a geologist. He knows for himself. Now there is an unknown (or a known, it is a matter of indifference) book presented to him, and he is asked what, and how valuable, it is. He opens it; and he finds that it describes, just as he has himself seen them in nature, the formations, fossils, ice-marks, volcanic forces, etc., of the earth. His reply is, This is a Geology, and it proceeded from a competent geologist. He argues from his original and independent knowledge of the theme to the character of the book which treats the same theme. So the Christian argues from his knowledge about God to the character of this book which contains the same knowledge.

It will be noted that this argument is not that which is sometimes summarized under the form, The Bible finds me, or, The Bible is inspired because it is inspiring. That is an

[1] This argument, though condensed, is, it is hoped, clear. If not, it may be found drawn out at greater length in previous papers of the author in this Quarterly, viz., 1883, p. 97 ff., 1891, p. 96 ff., particularly 1893, p. 344 ff.

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argument from effect to cause. I employ the Bible, yield myself to its teachings, and I find that it works a good work in my soul. I therefore conclude that it is divine. But this argument is a case of identification, or of the deductive application of a principle previously gained by induction to an observed case. It may be logically put thus: *A certain group of truths is God-wrought. The Bible is such a group. Therefore, it is God-wrought.* It rests for its conclusiveness upon the truth of the major premise, and upon the correctness of the observation which is summarized in the minor premise. These two things being ascertained to be correct, it follows as a matter of course.

The elucidation of the argument may be promoted by the consideration of an objection which will ordinarily be raised at this point. The Christian gets his knowledge from the Bible: and when he comes to the Bible, and finds the same things which he believes there, this fact, it is objected, can give no evidence to the Bible. His ideas rest upon the Bible; but what does the Bible rest upon? That question remains still unanswered. It does not prove some new representation of Palmer Cox's brownies to be true to *fact* because my little boy finds them true to his *ideas* of brownies, themselves created and nourished by other productions of Mr. Cox.

The objection is invalid because it overlooks a certain fact, which has already been stated, though not fully expanded. The knowledge with which the common Christian comes to the Bible is not derived from the Bible *in the sense meant.* It may be *historically* derived from the Bible, that is, the first knowledge of truth which the man had may have been communicated by the Bible, but after the experience of the new birth it is *logically* independent of the Bible. The man now knows it in a new way. In fact, he can be said truly to know it only after he has gained this new and independent knowledge. Is the student forever dependent logically upon his

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teacher for his knowledge of geology, though he did get all his initial ideas from him? Can he not rise to a point where he knows more than his teacher? possibly, where he can correct errors into which that teacher has fallen, if there are any such? So, if there were errors in the Bible, the Christian might come to where he could correct it, for he does gain—and this is the crucial point—he does gain a knowledge for which he is *no longer dependent upon the book from which he at first derived it.*

It might be said in further rebuttal of this objection, that the Christian is sometimes converted without any direct connection with the Bible. Martin Luther was brought to peace by the old monk who pointed him to the creed, not the Bible, which said: I believe in the forgiveness of sin. Still, of course, this creed, and other ordinary methods of presenting Christian truth are ultimately derived from the Bible. But this answer to the objection need not be insisted on, for the answer is complete, when it is presented as above, and also best, since it deals with the objection in its fundamental and strongest form.

The answer of another objection is still requisite. This argument does not prove the divine origin of the Bible, it will be said, for it would also prove the same of many another book which is quite human, as for example, Luther on the Galatians. I come to this book, and many others, and I find the same great truths taught which I have already come to accept, and I might say also, *This* book is wrought of God; but I should err. The argument, because it proves too much, does not prove anything.

The objection reveals an important fact, that such a book as Luther on the Galatians is, in a sense, wrought of God. Luther could only know these truths, of which the Christian has gained independent knowledge by experience, as he was in one way or another taught of God. Such knowledge can only come from God into the sinful world. But the slight-

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est examination of Luther shows that his work is a commentary, and that it only professes to set forth in more detailed form the truths contained in a portion of the Bible. That is the original, the commentary a derived book. And so, in actual fact will it be found in the case of every book containing the peculiar truths which have gained perfect evidence in the mind of the converted Christian. There is but one original, one unique book in this galaxy of truthful books, and that is the Bible. Its truth is God given; and as unique, it is in the full sense, to which no other book can lay justifiable claim, the Word of God.

So far the Christian man comes simply as a converted man, simply as knowing those elementary truths which are involved in the first great experience of his soul. But he does not pause here in his Christian life. Upon conversion follows sanctification, which may be defined, for the present purpose, as increasing stability and prevalence of holy choices. Choices depend upon emotional and intellectual states, and therefore imply knowledge of the truth. Thus as the Christian advances he is constantly acquiring a knowledge of the truth of God through the operations of his own soul. His mind is also illuminated by God. Every holy act, freeing the mind in some respect from the control of sin, tends to cause it to operate normally, or to weigh premises correctly, and hence to discover truth not before known. Hence the circle of independent knowledge is always enlarging. His first knowledge, arising from the experience of the new birth, was limited, though exceedingly comprehensive. Upon the basis of this he ascribed divinity to the Bible. When he has gained this increased knowledge, the argument, though the same in nature, becomes more detailed, and hence more stringent. The Bible is now seen to be the Word of God not merely in its central message, but in many auxiliary utterances. Its possible similarity to any human book, like Luther on the Galatians, which may contain, but is not wholly,

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the Word of God, begins to become entirely impossible.

But the life of the Christian is a constant growth, if it is normal, throughout its whole extent. It is nourished by the Bible, and produces an ever greater familiarity with its teachings. Now, the more the Christian reads the Bible, the more evidently do its new truths fit in perfectly into the complex of former known truths and become inseparably associated with them. The divinity of Christ is such a truth. It could never be known apart from the revelation given in the Bible, but when it is once known, and when the believing soul receives Christ as divine Lord, the consistency of this view of his nature with the experiences of the soul in reference to the difficulties and nature of forgiveness lends it such a confirmation that, once adopted, it cannot be relinquished. The atonement is another such truth. When thus known, these truths are known, to be sure, not with the same independent certainty with which the elementary truths given in the new birth are known, but still they are known with a sufficient degree of certainty, and upon the basis of sufficient experimental verification, to give them a character of true independence, and to make them additional evidence, by the employment of the same argument as before, that the Bible is the Word of God. Thus increased knowledge of the Bible enlarges the circle of truths conveyed by it which are known with greater or less certainty by the Christian to be the truth of God, and thus the proof of the divinity of the Bible from experience constantly increases.

Now, the Bible possesses one remarkable peculiarity. There are other sources of religious knowledge besides the Bible. The human reason acting upon the facts of the world, discovers truth respecting the ways of God in creation and providence which give increased knowledge of his greatness and sense of his wisdom. But the reason is weak, and when men follow it too confidently, they find themselves often astray. The whole body of Christian believers, who have re-

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flected upon the truths of religion, and have sought to put them into permanent and systematic form through a long series of ages, have much to teach the student of Christian truth. But they have often erred, and doubtless still often err. Neither of these sources is reliable in the sense that it affords a perfect standard by which the thoughts and imaginations of men may be tried. But the Bible never stands in need of correction, as the Christian examines it, and tests it by this increasing and accumulating mass of Christian knowledge which he acquires. And hence, by cumulative evidence, derived from his increasing knowledge of Christian truth, the Bible at last assumes to the mind of the Christian the character of a standard or norm of religious and moral truth. He expects to find it nowhere defective. He is ready to yield it his confidence when it speaks of spheres beyond the reach of experience, of Heaven and of Hell. It is thus a *norm;* and as such, then, considered as a whole, in its fundamental message with the most immediate certainty, in truth allied with this with a certainty only of slightly lower grade, in all its parts with some certainty, the Scripture is evidenced to him as the Word of God, as the utterance by God through human agents of absolute moral and religious truth.[1]

II.

Confirmation of the Fundamental Proof.

The authority for the Scriptures as the Word of God gained by the process just sketched is the authority of God speaking in the soul of the Christian. The work of the Spirit upon his heart in the experience of conversion bears its testimony to the Scriptures. The testimony of the Spirit is the work of the Spirit; the work of the Spirit is the experience

[1] For a valuable historical review of this proof of the doctrine *(testimonium Spiritus Sancti)* the reader is referred to articles by Dr. Simon, Bib. Sac., 1891, pp. 27 ff., 369 ff.

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of the Christian; in the light shed upon the Scriptures by his experience, the Christian sees their divinity immediately.

Thus for himself alone, any Christian has in his own experience, if it is normal, sufficient ground for believing the Bible to be the Word of God. But the individual Christian does not stand alone, either in having his experience, or in coming to the judgment he makes upon the Scriptures. Any single experience is liable to the possibility that it may arise not from that which is common to Christians at large with the individual who undergoes it, but from that which is peculiar to himself, and so subjective and unreliable. A certain confirmation is therefore needed for his experience before it shall seem even to himself lifted above all possibility of question, and certainly before he can commend it to others as normal and sufficient. Just as no man in a matter of equally vital importance, when he had once heard of color-blindness, would venture to trust his own eyes till he had had them tested by comparison with the eyes of others, so here. The first confirmation sought for the utterance of his experience is in the experience of others; and it is the experience of others that the Spirit does really testify to the Scriptures as the Word of God.

Evidence of this is to be found in the writings of leading teachers of the church whose books have acquired almost the character of symbols. For example, Augustine somewhere says: "Inwardly in the home of my thoughts, truth, which is neither Hebrew, nor Greek, nor Latin, nor barbarian, without the organs of mouth and tongue, without the sound of syllables, would say: 'He [Moses] speaks the truth'; and I rendered certain immediately, should say confidently to that man of thine, 'Thou speakest truth.'" On the basis of what the Christian knows, he can affirm something of the utterances of Moses. Luther says, in the same strain: "The true hearer of the divine word can add thereto that it is not the word of man, but of a certainty the Word of God; *for*

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God teaches him inwardly. . . . I must have God's own word [viz., for the Scriptures]; I want to hear what God says. . . . I must know that as certainly as I know that three and two make five." Luther is not perfectly exact in this expression, for the Christian does not receive a mathematical certainty in respect to the Bible. Some of the elements of his original knowledge derived from the new birth itself, are of a probable character, as that of the existence of God who thus moves upon him, though possessing a very high degree of proof. Luther's language is thus a strong, rhetorical expression rather than a strictly correct metaphysical one; but his meaning is still clear and correct.[1] In Calvin the doctrine of the testimony of the Spirit, which is scarcely more than hinted at in these passages, is for the first time fully brought out, though even in him attended with some defects. He says: "Let it be considered, then, as an undeniable truth that they who have been inwardly taught by the Spirit, feel an entire acquiescence in the Scripture, and that it is self-authenticated, carrying with it its own evidence, and ought not to be made the subject of demonstration and arguments from reason; but it obtains the credit which it deserves with us by the testimony of the Spirit."[2] And, to quote but one more of these, and now one who will be of special interest to every American, Jonathan Edwards says: "He that truly sees the divine, transcendent, supreme glory of those things which are divine, does, as it were, know their divinity *intuitively;* he not only argues but *sees* that they are divine. . . . Thus a soul may have a kind of intuitive knowledge of the divinity of the things exhibited in the gospel; not that he judges the doctrines of the gospel to be from God without any argument or deduction at all; but it is without any long chain of arguments; the argument is but one and the evidence direct; the mind ascends to the truth of the gospel but one step, and that is its divine glory."[3]

[1] See Simon, *l.c.* [2] Institutes, Bk. i. chap. vii. sect. 5.
[3] Works (Dwight ed.), Vol. v. p. 178 f.

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When Calvin had fully formulated his view in the last edition of his Institutes (1559), it was immediately taken up with great heartiness by the Reformed churches. The same year saw it incorporated in the Confession of the French churches then first put forth in the Synod of Paris. In fact, this symbol was of Calvin's own original composition. It runs: "We know these books to be canonical and the sure rule of our faith, not so much by the common accord and consent of the church, as by the testimony and inward illumination of the Holy Spirit which enables us to distinguish them from other ecclesiastical books." The Belgic Confession, not composed by Calvin, is to the same effect. And the Westminster, closing the list of the great symbols of the Reformation, says: "The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man or church, but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author thereof. . . . Our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the word in our hearts."

A great number of other witnesses to the value and genuineness of this argument might be cited, but the reader may pursue the theme in the articles of Dr. Simon. Among American theologians, two may, however, be cited; one because he produced the first complete and independent system of theology in this country,—Samuel Hopkins; and the other, because of the clearness with which he states the argument, although, standing upon the threshold of the rationalizing period in New England theology, he makes nothing of it in comparison with the other arguments,—Enoch Pond. Hopkins says: "The contents of the Bible . . . are the greatest and crowning evidence that these writings are given by divine inspiration. . . . The highest internal evidence is fully discerned only by the humble, honest mind, which is disposed to relish, love and receive the truth. To such the true light

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shines from the Holy Scriptures with irresistible evidence, and their hearts are established in the truth. They believe from evidence they have within themselves, from what they see and find in the Bible."[1] And Pond: "'If any man,' saith Christ, 'will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God.' The Christians have fulfilled the condition here proposed, and they realize the truth of the promise. They do know of the doctrine that *it is of God.* They find such a blessed agreement between the representations of Scripture and the feelings of their own heart, that they cannot doubt as to the divine origin of the Bible. It must have proceeded from the same Being who knows the hearts of his children perfectly, and has so accurately set them forth in the pages of his Word. This argument has more weight, probably, than every other, with Christians in common life."[2]

One other fact in the same direction may be mentioned. The fact that the conviction of the authority of the Bible does develop with the development of Christian experience in the individual and the church may be seen, written as with gigantic letters, in the general reception of the Scriptures and their constant use in the church, in spite of the attacks which are from time to time made upon them. When the eye is directed to the practical work of the church in saving souls, it would sometimes seem as if discussions as to the inspiration, integrity, and reliability of the Scriptures had never taken place, so unmoved does the church appear, so unchanged her methods. She goes on employing the Bible as the Word of God without question as to what men say. Such a fact speaks volumes for her inner certainty, which is independent of external arguments.

The proof as thus drawn out is, as has been repeatedly stated, an independent one. Still it stands in certain relations to other facts, for all truth is one; and it makes a certain as-

[1] System (ed. 1852), p. 23 f.

[2] Lectures on Christian Theology, 1874, p. 120.

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sumption as to the genuineness and authenticity of the biblical books. Were the whole Old and New Testaments forged, as some erratic writer has recently maintained, somewhere about the year 1000 A. D., this fact would be obviously inconsistent with the conclusion as to the truth of the doctrines which the book teaches, and its origin in the divine will. While the proof may be consistent with many conceivable views as to critical matters in respect to the authors, age, preservation, etc., of the sacred writings, it could not be consistent with such an utter distortion of the historical perspective as the supposition referred to would involve.

It is therefore another confirmation of the argument, and not altogether unnecessary in the development of the argument itself, that the general external historical facts as to the Bible correspond with this firm conviction of the church which it derives from its own God-wrought experience. The Old Testament evidently embodies the religious life of the Jewish people. It is undoubtedly, in its present form, the production of an antiquity greatly anterior to the Christian era. That is to say, in a general way, a broad sense, it is genuine. Is the Pentateuch the production of Moses? It may, or it may not be. Certainly it is an undisputed fact that it comes, in part at least, from the first periods of the development of a religious consciousness in Israel, and all of it belongs in substance to a period far antedating the appearance of Christ. When it actually did arise, under what circumstances and by what agents it was brought into its present shape, are questions to be answered by biblical criticism. The present argument does not require them to be answered before it is allowed to have a conclusive weight in deciding the character of the Bible. Then, again, it evidently contains a reliable record of the formation by this people progressively of certain distinct religious ideas. That is, it is in a general and broad sense, authentic. And the ideas which it teaches, though sometimes undeveloped as compared with those of the

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Christian Scriptures, form the necessary historical background of these, agree with them, and prepare the way for them. The New Testament, in like manner, is a collection of books of homogeneous nature and similar origin, testifying to the historical existence of Jesus Christ, and written by his disciples and followers of the first century. It also is in general genuine and authentic. Should the book of Jonah be thrown out of the canon by future investigation, or should the fourth Gospel be found to be the product of a later age, and not a component part of the apostolic tradition of the life of Jesus, these facts would not invalidate the argument from experience for the rest of the Bible, though such a process of division and elimination could not be indefinitely pursued. But up to the present hour, such results have not been reached by criticism, and the church may wisely dismiss speculation as to what she would be compelled to do if they were, and confining herself to the facts of the case, require that facts, and facts only, be urged upon her before she is called upon to deny that of which she is fully persuaded upon the grounds which have now passed in review.

III.

Relations of this Argument in the System.

The basis has now been gained through the argument from the testimony of the Spirit to the Scriptures as the word of God, for their employment in the construction of the system of Christian doctrine. A certain amount of indefiniteness still hangs over the subject, and it is not altogether clear what the exact limits of the proper use of the Bible may be. But enough has been made out to enable the Christian thinker to go on with confidence to discuss the Scriptures as the revelation of the will of God in all the vast sphere of religious and moral truth. He will require no long consideration before accepting those laws of general hermeneutics

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which are employed in the interpretation of other ancient documents as the great principles of the exegesis of the Bible. Evidently, before he can go farther, and define more minutely a doctrine of inspiration, setting forth its limits and characteristics, it will be necessary to become fully acquainted with the contents of the Scriptures. This is presupposed in all *a posteriori* systems of divinity, or systems which attempt to base the theory of doctrine upon the facts. It has sometimes, however, seemed as if the method of proof adopted sought to rise in some way above the facts, or to strike into some path which should prove the authority of the Scriptures independently of their contents. If this could be done, it might afford a certain advantage in dealing with the unbeliever, since the theologian might come to him with the demand that he should accept the teachings of the Bible, whatever they might be found to be, on the basis of the delineated proof, itself formed before the investigator opened the Bible. But all such methods are illusive. There never can be a proof of the authority and inspiration of the Bible independent of its contents, for after any such proof were finished the question would remain, Is this the book about which the proof has been given? To connect any proof with the definite book we call the Bible, the Bible must itself be known; and hence the system of doctrines derived from the Scriptures is an essential part of the proof of their authority. The system of theology needs therefore to be developed at the point to which the argument has now been brought, before more detailed investigations can be begun.

We must, therefore, suppose that at this point the system of doctrines is set forth in all its amplitude of discussion and proof. What the result would be, as it lies in the mind of the writer, need not be further defined than to style it the "evangelical" system, which is the common possession of the churches usually designated by this adjective. Between different denominations and different teachers minor differ-

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ences exist, but they are of little importance for the present theme, since sufficient scope may be found for the proof in those elements of the system which are common to all. If here and there, some special weight should seem to be laid upon the peculiar views of the school of theologians to which the writer in a general way belongs, this will not invalidate the force of the proof, for such considerations will be of minor importance, and will bear no considerable proportion to the whole mass of arguments presented. The system having been, therefore, detailed, the proof of the Scriptures proceeds from the close of the topic of Eschatology as follows.

IV.

THE AUTHORITY OF THE SCRIPTURES.

1. The system of theology as a coherent whole is a proof of the authority of the book upon which it is founded.

The system of theology is a real system. It has coherency. Given one part of it, and other parts are required. Take away one leading truth from it, and others will also disappear. Now, this coherency is a proof of the truth of the system. Truth has sometimes been defined as conformity to fact or reality. But evidently this is not an altogether satisfactory definition, since the question will immediately arise, What is fact? and the answer must always be, that fact for us is our idea of the fact. It is therefore a deeper and better definition of truth to say, that it is the conformity of idea to idea, of all our ideas to one another. When all our ideas harmonize, we have the truth so far as we can know it. An idea is shown to be false when it is shown to be inconsistent with some idea or group of ideas which has already acquired fixity in our minds on account of its ascertained harmony with other ideas which we cannot question. And when some other idea in connection with the same subject harmonizes with those ideas with which the former did not, then this is

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accepted as the truth. Thus the mere fact of the internal harmony of a certain group of ideas one with another is a sign of their truth. It is not a conclusive proof, for there may be imaginary systems of thought, systems which start from premises which are assumed without sufficient scrutiny of the evidence for them, and which, while logically consistent within themselves, are not consistent with ideas lying outside of themselves, and so lack ability to meet the final test of complete harmony with all our ideas. But such a system must necessarily be a limited system. Any comprehensive system, of any considerable magnitude, must touch other ideas of diverse nature at so many points as to meet with constant disproof, if it is wholly imaginary while consistent with itself; and this inconsistency with other ideas will finally make itself manifest in internal inconsistency. It is not likely that any large circle of false ideas will prove to be internally coherent. And thus it remains that the simple fact of internal harmony, coherency, consistency, in a system of thought is, so far forth, a proof of its truth. Now, the system of theology is such a coherent system; and it has, consequently, in this mere fact, an initial proof of its truth.

From the truth of the system we argue the truth of the Bible. That system is at its most decisive points derived from the Bible and these points are necessary to give meaning and value to the other elements. For example, the Trinity is entirely a matter of revelation, so are election, grace, and future punishment. In a sense, the system may be said to be the Bible. That book is a great whole containing a multitude of elements, presenting to the first glance a confusing abundance of rich and striking ideas. It has now been studied, its ideas carefully arranged and their relations ascertained, and the resulting system is the Bible in another form. The system is coherent, and therefore true. And this is the same as saying that the Bible is true.

Now, the truth of the Bible is its authority. When the

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question is put, whether the Bible possesses authority or not, the meaning of this question is, whether it teaches the truth or not. The answer is now obtained, so far as this single argument is capable of affording an answer, that it does teach the truth, or that it has authority.

But, now, it is conceivable, though not very probable, when we consider the magnitude of the system,—it is conceivable that the system of theology may be one of those circles of ideas complete and consistent within itself, but not, after all, true. It should therefore be tested as to its conformity with the entire mass of sound human ideas; and of these, that group which is the peculiar possession of the Christian may be first employed as a touchstone to reveal its truth. Accordingly—

2. The system of doctrine found in the Bible receives confirmation from its comparison with the contents of the specifically Christian experience.

Certain elements of the system are derived with equal directness and completeness from the original and fundamental Christian experience as from the Bible itself, such as the new birth and sanctification. The new-born soul knows that it has become a new creature by the formation of a new and fixed choice of duty, and knows certain truths which flow from this quite as well upon the basis of experience as upon the teaching of the Bible. This point, as having already been sufficiently discussed, may be dismissed with a mere mention.

Other elements, when presented to the Christian upon the authority of the Bible and accepted, unite in perfect harmony with the elementary truths known by immediate experience. Such are the personality of the Holy Spirit, the Trinity, the deity of Christ.

Other elements, when tried experimentally by the Christian, give the exact results promised in the Bible, such as justification by faith. This argument, which might be almost indefinitely expanded, has been so fully and excellently de-

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veloped by the late Professor Stearns in his "Evidence of Christian Experience" that it need not be more than suggested here.

And, if any further proof is needed of the conformity of the biblical system to those ideas which are the peculiar product in the Christian's mind of all his life experience, it may be found in the fact, already adduced in the fundamental argument, that the older the Christian grows, and the firmer the grounds of his hope, the more complete is his confidence in the Scriptures as true. Thus the Bible sustains the first test with spheres of thought lying outside of itself.

Let the comparison now be made with the sphere of human history, and it will be seen that—

3. The system as a whole constitutes the key of history, and unlocks the mysteries of the world. In this we have, upon the broadest scale, a proof of its truth and of the authority of the book from which it is derived.

Take, as one example of this argument, the largest fact in the history of the world, the coming of Christ as an historical force. It is no exaggeration, but simply historical propriety, to say that this was the pivotal event of all history. We date our era from it. It was the entrance into the world of an institution, the Christian church, which has proved to have more vitality than all other institutions which civilization has known. It has not only outlasted the Roman Empire, but it supplied the spiritual and intellectual forces which could master the enormous problem put upon the world by the rise of new races in the North and by their migration, which could bring new peoples into harmony with the old, save the good of the past, and produce the modern world with its literature, science, and law. Nothing but its divinity, and the divinity of its central personality, Christ, can explain the unbounded importance which time has revealed in the scene at Bethlehem, when a babe was born in a manger, before whom the wise men of the earth came and bowed in

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homage, while heaven-taught rustics gazed on in amazement. The central position of Christ in history, and his central position in the system which describes the ruin and the recovery of man, correspond; and this correspondence is a proof of the system and of the book.

But continue the application of tests. Let the system be compared now with human philosophy, especially where this presents insuperable difficulties, and it may be said that—

4. In its separate elements, the system, as affording repeatedly a key to the difficulties of human thought and bringing them into harmony, affords us a proof of its own truth and of the authority of the Bible from which it is derived.

(1) As to the existence of God, the natural reason leaves us in darkness; but the ideas of revelation clear up the obscurity.

The cosmological argument gives us an independent something, but does not teach us whether it is personal, infinite, or God. It may be a mere force working according to an inward necessity. This is the pantheistic conception, and it is not removed by this argument.

The teleological argument adds personality; but it does not prove infinity, unity, or holiness. Not infinity, because it requires only a cause sufficient to produce the universe which we see. True, we are inclined to rise in our conceptions of this cause as we rise in our knowledge of the universe, and to ascribe infinity to the cause of a system which ever surpasses our comprehension; but this argument is derived from the Bible. Not unity, for the line of retreating causes, demiurge rising above demiurge, must stop somewhere, and may stop in a plurality of independently existing forces or beings. Not holiness, for the world contains unholiness.

The ontological argument does not help us; for the highest ideal of some minds, even in the present century, has

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been that the absolute being was equal to "nothing," that is, was an undefined, immense, blind force.

But the Christian idea of God, applied as a key, unlocks the mystery and brings all these other arguments into perfect consistency and clearness. It is an hypothesis which explains the facts; and it has in this consideration the proof of its correctness. Starting with the idea of one personal, infinite cause, the "independent something" becomes this cause. The demiurge is also identified with this being. The retreating series of causes which might give us a group of equal demiurges, or an infinite series of causes, now becomes at once the single, infinite, first cause. The reasonable alternative is between a series of causes *ad infinitum* and a first cause. When the latter idea is once given, it is evidently the more reasonable. And, as for the ontological argument, the idea of God, formed from the Scriptures, is in fact the highest idea which the mind of man can conceive; and thus it furnishes the contents which were hitherto lacking to this argument.

(2) The revealed doctrine of the immortality of the soul, doubtful to the natural reason, clears up largely the mysteries of life and renders the human lot explicable.

The mysteries referred to are principally those which are afforded by the existence of pain and by the various inequalities which are seen in the world. The case of a child born into the world deformed and suffering because of the vice of a father, is well-nigh irreconcilable with the idea of a just God except it be understood that there is another life, for which the present is but preparatory, where such inequalities may be made up. The uncertainty with which righteousness and happiness are combined in the experience of the same individual upon earth, as was pointed out by the philosopher Kant, leaves us in great perplexity till the thought of another world where virtue shall have its due reward removes the difficulty.

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(3) The divine benevolence, combined with the idea of law in the divine action, both originally Christian ideas, and the former in particular unknown except through the Bible, explains the mysteries of the divine government so as greatly to relieve the difficulty arising from the existence of sin in the world.

It will be enough at this point to refer to the excellent and balanced suggestions which Dr. N. W. Taylor gave as to the prevention of sin, the best contribution to the subject of theodicy which has yet been made. His general idea was that God chose to establish a system in which free will should enter as a factor, and that he may possibly have seen that to prevent sin in such a system might produce more injury in the weakness consequent, or in other natural result, than the permission of some sin. He chose to maintain a system, as the best method of divine government, and to maintain that system which, though it contained some sin, contained the greatest amount of good.

(4) The universality of sin is a truth admitted by almost all thinkers, even in heathen lands. There is no explanation which accounts for its general prevalence, which does not consist essentially in explaining the thing by itself, except the biblical doctrine of the corruption of our nature derived from the transgression of Adam.

(5) The influence of Jesus in the world is a constant puzzle to merely human thought; but the biblical doctrine of the incarnation, as the secret of his uniqueness, explains the puzzle. And so, the possibility of an adequate revelation to men, which can scarcely have complete evidence of its absolute trustworthiness if it be communicated only by fallible men, is also explained by the doctrine of the incarnation. The revealer of God is himself also God.

(6) There is a contradiction evident in the simplest experience of the new convert, which he does not himself understand, and which would remain an unsolved mystery for

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all thinking, were it not explained by the Bible, the mystery how the holy God can regard a sinner with favor. Those two terms, sinner and favor, do not belong together according to natural reason. But the doctrine of the atonement, an exclusively biblical doctrine, as the provision whereby men can be forgiven, solves this mystery also.

(7) But there is another. How, in actual fact, when there is universal corruption, and even were this not so, universal bad example, all the forces of the world and the heart of man preponderatingly bad,—how is it that any man ever comes out from under the power of sin and is saved? The only answer which can be given to this mystery is the biblical doctrine of prevenient grace. God first touches the human heart and moves it toward himself. Though man is a sinner, the holy God moves him towards holiness.

Now these are all difficulties of thinking, arising either from the contemplation of nature or of the system of grace as it is in operation, which apart from the Bible turn out to be, actually, insoluble to human thinking. The Bible solves them. It introduces harmony into realms of thought where there otherwise is no harmony. Thus it agrees with the system of human thinking outside of itself, nay more, it is indispensable to that human thinking in accomplishing its own work. Tested, then, by this third sphere outside of itself, it is found to be in harmony with it.

The process of testing the agreement of the system with other spheres of truth is not, however, done. The sphere just examined is that of the philosophical activity of mankind, considered upon the side of its difficulties, raised but not solved by the mind. But there is another way in which these two spheres may be compared. The human reason arrives by its own peculiar processes at certain results in which it has confidence; and of these it may be said that—

5. At various points the system is confirmed by the independent testimony of the reason. Thus—

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(1) The freedom of the will, a truth provable by consciousness, and hence a result of human thinking, confirms the Christian theodicy. Sin may exist in a world created by a good and almighty God, if free will is an element of that world, since free will involves the power to choose the evil. Other considerations must enter in to complete this theodicy, but here we have enough to begin it; and this is given by the natural reason.

(2) The Scriptures teach that the government of God extends to all human events, though never so minute. Reason teaches that, if God be the first, he must be ultimately the sole, cause, and hence must govern all things.

(3) The universality of sin is a matter of common human observation.

(4) Reason confirms the biblical doctrine of the nature and existence of human corruption.

When a philosopher has come to acknowledge the existence of human sin, he will perceive that it consists fundamentally in the choice of something other than the greatest good. The question will then immediately rise, How this other thing acquires to the man the character of an apparent good, so as to lead to its choice in preference to that which is the real good. We are to suppose the philosopher in question to be an enlightened one, standing upon such a height of knowledge as is represented in those systems of philosophy of our own day which, while not Christian in their origin, acknowledge the main facts of the human constitution, including conscience. To such a one it will be immediately evident that a first element in the required explanation is to be found in the weakness of conscience. Many men never consider the question of obligation at all. Their only question is, What is of advantage to me in the pursuit of my plans? Then, the intellect is perverted from the pursuit of the highest themes to the lowest, or the lower. The will of God, duty, purity of life, the providence of God as seen in history, are neglected

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for the invention of means of livelihood, etc. And again, the lower emotions are more active than the higher, desire for power than love to God. This is found to depend upon two factors, the disorder of the body, which causes its appetites to work with ill-regulated and unnatural force, and the disorder in the world, whereby all its influence, the distribution of its prizes, its whole tone, promote sin. And finally, the force of habit perpetuates and intensifies the evil, once begun.

Now, this is disorder of nature. It is not an ultimate explanation of the question raised, for the weakness of conscience is partially explained by the dullness produced by repeated neglect of its monitions. Thus sin is explained by sin. The perversity of the intellect, and the disorder of the body are themselves facts which call for causes and explanations thereby. But the immediate answer given by reason for the universality of sin is the same as the Bible's, that man, as he is, is corrupt.

To mention but one more of the illustrations of this point,—

(5) Reason confirms the necessity of the atonement to forgiveness.

This confirmation follows upon several lines of reflection. But one need be mentioned here. The law of God, both as given in conscience and in the Bible, attaches penalty to sin. Now, the law is founded in benevolence, that is, was laid down for the good of man. The penalty attached to it, is also for his good. It also, as well as the mandates of the law, has its origin in the benevolence of God. Now, evidently, if such a penalty, with such an origin, and solemnly and tenderly prescribed, is to be remitted in favor of the sinner, there must be some explicit and satisfactory reason for doing this; and when the Bible comes forward with a doctrine of atonement, the reason must say that such a doctrine was a necessity of the case.

But enough of this line of argument. To summarize the

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course of the whole discussion and to gain a clear view of the present position of the question,—the Scriptures were first commended to us in general as the Word of God by the testimony of the Spirit. Upon this basis they were employed according to the recognized principles of hermeneutics and they yielded a self-consistent system of religious doctrine. In its coherency with itself, this system had the first proof of its truth. But it has been successively compared with other spheres of truth, historical, experiential, philosophical, and has been found to be harmonious with them also. Thus it has the highest evidence of its truth, which consists essentially in the ultimate harmony of ideas. Its truth is its authority. It binds us because it speaks the truth. It has authority over us at points where we have not yet examined its entire truthfulness, because it has always spoken the truth hitherto. This is the meaning of the word "authority" when applied to a book such as the Scriptures. We need, however, to add certain elements to our study not yet introduced, and so must pass to consider, next, the nature and limitations of the authority of the Scriptures.

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