

THE DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE.

THE REFORMERS AND THE PRINCETON SCHOOL.

IN my article on the late Prof. W. Robertson Smith's *Doctrine of Scripture* in the EXPOSITOR for October, 1894, I ventured to show that while it agreed with that of the Reformers it differed from what is commonly called the doctrine of the Princeton School. Want of space compelled me to state the points of difference very briefly. Several American correspondents, personally unknown to myself, have suggested that I should contrast the theories more fully: and the kindness of the editor of the EXPOSITOR has now permitted me to do this.

By the theory of the Princeton School is meant the doctrine of Scripture to be found in the *Systematic Theology* of the late Dr. Charles Hodge—*clarum et venerabile nomen*—in Dr. A. A. Hodge's *Commentary on the Confession of Faith*, and in a suggestive and sagacious article on *Inspiration* written by Dr. A. A. Hodge and Dr. Warfield for the *Princeton Review*, April, 1881. It is the doctrine of Scripture to be found in these treatises that is to be contrasted with that held by the Reformers.

If I am compelled to point out a real departure on the part of these American theologians in this one doctrine of Scripture from the theology of the Reformation, I trust it will not be supposed that I have any disposition to undervalue the massive contributions to Systematic, nor the rich experimental theology which have characterised the Princeton School.

The common doctrine of the Reformers about Holy Scripture, as I showed in my former article, may be summed up under two principal and four subordinate statements. In

the first place, they held, in opposition to mediæval theology, that the *supreme* value of the Bible did not consist in the fact, true though it be, that it is the ultimate source of theology, but in the fact that it contains the whole message of God's redeeming love to every believer—the *personal* message to *me*. In the second place, they held that the faith which laid hold on this personal message was not mere assent to propositions, but personal trust on the personal God revealing Himself in His redeeming purpose—a trust called forth by the witness of the Spirit testifying in and through the Scripture, that God was speaking therein. These two thoughts of Scripture and faith always correspond. In mediæval theology they are primarily intellectual and propositional; in Reformation theology they are primarily experimental and personal. Hence the witness of the Spirit, which emphasizes this experimental and personal character of Scripture, forms part of almost every statement of the Doctrine of Scripture in Reformation theology.¹ The four subordinate statements which are really implied in the two primary ones are, as I explained, —(1) There is a distinction to be drawn between Scripture and the Word of God, or between the record and the Divine manifestation of God, His will and His love, which the record conveys; (2) This true distinction must not be used to imply that the Spirit witnesses apart from the record, nor that one part of the record is the Word of God while another is not, nor must it prevent us saying that the record is the Word of God; (3) But it implies that the infallibility and authoritative character of Scripture belong to it, not in itself, but because it is the record which contains or presents or conveys the Word of God—it is the Word of God which is

¹ First Helvetic Confession, § 5; Second Helvetic Confession, §§ 1, 5; French Confession of 1559, §§ 2, 4; Belgic Confession of 1561, §§ 2, 5; Scotch Confession of 1560, §§ 4, 19; Westminster Confession, chap. i., 4, 5. For a fuller discussion see the Preface to Luther's German Bible, Luther's *Freiheit eines Christenmenschen*, and Calvin's *Institutes*, Bk. I. vii., Bk. III. ii. 6.

primarily infallible and authoritative, and this infallibility and authority are received through faith, not through intellectual assent; (4) God has framed and preserved the record which contains or presents His Word under a singular care and providence.

The explanation and vindication of these points will be found in my former article,¹ but I may be permitted to point out that the distinction stated and guarded in the first three makes provision for the admitted fact, that the personal manifestation of God which is in every part of Scripture is given in a course of events which are part of human history. To apprehend the manifestation we must have faith, whose province it is to apprehend Divine infallibility and authority;² to apprehend the human casing or the historical credibility of the record it is sufficient to use the ordinary means of research. This distinction justifies all historical Biblical criticism or interpretation. The fourth proposition enjoins that all such criticism must be conducted in a reverent spirit, and in full recognition that the record dealt with has been and is under the singular care and providence of God.

When we turn to the systematic theology of the Princeton School, I am somewhat sadly forced to the conclusion that in their statement of this one doctrine of the Scripture the mediæval type predominates, and has thrust the grand Reformation thought into the background. I use the word "systematic" designedly, for the experimental theology of these American divines is richly evangelical, and their experimental use of Scripture is quite free from the mediæval taint.

This approximation to the mediæval type comes out in four ways—in the purely intellectual apprehension which they have of Scripture, in their reduction of the real dis-

¹ EXPOSITOR, Oct., 1894, p. 250 ff.

² Westminster Confession of Faith, chap. xiv. 2.

inction between the Word of God and Scripture to a merely formal difference, in their formal as opposed to a religious reading of the thoughts of the infallibility and authority of Scripture, and in their still more formal relegation of the strict infallibility of Scripture to unknown and unknowable original autographs of the Scripture records.

1. *Their purely intellectual apprehension of Scripture.* We are told, for example, that the main object in revelation is the communication of knowledge, and that the object in inspiration is to secure infallibility in teaching. The effect of revelation is to make men wiser, and of inspiration to preserve the recipient from error in teaching.¹ Then, as if to make the change of view from Reformation theology more emphatic, Dr. Hodge omits in his quotations from the reformed creeds, which introduce the chapter on the Protestant Rule of Faith, those portions which include the thought of the witness of the Spirit as an integral part of the doctrine of Scripture. He omits the fifth paragraph of the Second Helvetic Confession, the fourth paragraph of the French Confession, and the fourth and fifth paragraphs of the Westminster Confession.² He does not ignore this distinctively Reformation doctrine altogether. He brings it forward more than once, especially when confuting the idea that Scripture is to be received on the authority of the Church,³ and when he turns from systematic to experimental theology, as in a powerful essay on the *Ground of Faith in Scripture*.⁴ But this supreme thought of the witness of the Spirit, which marked the personal as opposed to the merely intellectual idea of Scripture introduced by the Reformers, is not made a distinctive and essential part of the doctrine of Scripture. It is not used to make clear the supreme contention of the

¹ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, ed. of 1871, p. 155.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 151, 152.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

⁴ *Essays and Reviews*, p. 188 ff., cf. *Way of Life*.

Reformers, that the Bible is above all things a record of God's personal dealing in deeds and by words with the saints of old, and therefore with us. On the contrary revelation is treated as if it were concerned mainly if not entirely with the communication of knowledge, which consists of doctrines, facts and precepts. I do not mean to say that the Reformers did not find a communication of knowledge in the Holy Scriptures, and that passages cannot be extracted from their writings which are similar to what is asserted by the Princeton School. But their universal thought is that all such passages describe Scripture not in its primary but in its secondary aspect, and their universal contention is that Scripture is above all things the record of God's words and deeds of love to the saints of old, and of the answer of their inmost heart to God. It is this personal manifestation of God which is the main thing: the knowledge which comes along with that manifestation is important, and makes men wise *unto salvation*; but the doctrine comes from and through the promise, not the promise in and through the doctrine. To say that the main object in revelation is to make men wiser, instead of saying that it is to give personal manifestation of God and the possibility of blessed personal communion with Him, is exactly what Thomas Aquinas declares, when he tells us that "our faith (intellectual assent) rests on the revelations made to the prophets and apostles who wrote the canonical books." The mediæval theologian is consistent, for he thinks that salvation is possible by the existence of a doctrine "*per revelationem de iis quae hominis captum excedunt et nonnullis etiam aliis quae humana ratione investigari possunt.*"¹ The rich experimental theology of the Princeton School, while it has not saved them from the formalist idea that the Bible

¹ Dr. Hodge and Dr. Warfield contentedly place a quotation from the Council of Trent alongside of extracts from Reformed Creeds, as if Scripture meant the same thing in Roman Catholic and in Reformation theology, *Princeton Review*, II. p. 240.

gives us mainly information which can be worked up into doctrines, is certainly free from the corresponding formal thought that man is saved by assenting to the gospel stated in the form of propositions. Yet the two ideas are correlative, and the logical consequence of thrusting the personal element in Scripture into the background is the presentation of Christ in the form of a doctrine rather than of a personal Saviour, and the transformation of faith into assent to a proposition instead of personal trust in a personal Saviour.

2. *Their reduction of the real distinction between the Word of God and Scripture to a really formal difference.* Scripture is the Word of God. This is a genuine Reformation thought. It is because Scripture is the Word of God that it is authoritative and infallible. But the sense put on these declarations depends on the force of the copula *is*, which some theologians insist on reading, as Luther read it in the phrase, "THIS IS MY BODY." The Reformers, however, did not use the copula *is* to denote logical identity. They made it clear that while they could honestly and earnestly say that Scripture is the Word of God, they could nevertheless make a real distinction between the two. Zwingli's use of *Evangelium*, whose sum is, "that our Lord Jesus Christ, the very Son of God, has revealed to us the will of the Heavenly Father, and with His innocence has redeemed us from death and reconciled us to God."¹ Calvin's phrase, "that the word itself, *however conveyed to us*, is like a mirror in which faith may behold God";² the use made in the Scots' Confession of the "Revelation of the Promise";³ the way in which Reformed creeds and other subordinate standards interpreted the copula by such words as *contains*, *presents*, *conveys*, *records*, all show that there was a real distinction in the minds of the Reformers between the Word of God and Scripture.

¹ Zurich Articles of 1523. Art. i. 2.

² *Inst.*, III. ii. 6.

³ Art. iv.

What this distinction is, can be seen in the Westminster Confession of Faith.¹ The Word of God consists of God's commands, threatenings, promises, and, above all, of the Gospel offer of Christ to us, and these are conveyed to us in every part of Scripture. These, and none other, are the things which faith receives as infallibly true and authoritative, and neither the Westminster nor any other Reformed Confession recognises an infallibility and authority which is apprehended otherwise than by faith.

It is somewhat difficult to say whether theologians of the Princeton School recognise this real distinction between the Word of God and Scripture. After careful study of the article by Dr. Hodge and Dr. Warfield, I have come to the conclusion that they do not see any but a merely formal difference. Some passages in that article might lead to an opposite conclusion,² but their purely intellectual idea of Scripture, and the use of italics and small capitals on other pages, have reluctantly compelled me to believe that they do not believe what the Reformers so definitely taught. In reading the article, I was constantly reminded of Luther at Marburg. He chalked *HOC EST CORPUS MEUM* on a table, and whenever Zwingli offered any explanation of the word *est*, he simply repeated the words. They print "The Scriptures ARE THE WORD OF GOD," and the phrase with its capital letters comes in regularly like a refrain. Dr. Hodge's strange explanation of the section of the Westminster Confession (xiv. 2) confirms this view.³ He actually says there, that we must first settle what books belong to the canon of Scripture before we can accept with faith the whole Word of God. He makes faith include: *first*, assent to propositions; and *secondly*, trust in a personal Christ, making in genuine mediæval fashion the

¹ xiv. 2.

² *Presbyterian Review*, vol. ii., cf. pp. 227-229.

³ *Commentary on the Conf. of Faith*. Ed. 1870, pp. 204-7.

promise come from the doctrine, and not the doctrine from the promise.

The Reformers had a vital religious interest in the distinction which is ignored by the Princeton School. All were agreed that Scripture was the Word of God—mediæval theologians as well as Reformers—but the mediæval Church understood God's Word to mean an intellectual revelation giving information about Christian doctrine and precept, and looked in Scripture for that alone, and where no intellectual mysteries were plainly seen produced them out of "dead histories" by allegorical interpretation. The Reformers, on the other hand, regarded God's Word as the sum of His saving activity manifesting itself in a personal converse with man, and saw in Scripture the story of God's dealings with the saints of old which can never be a dead history. Jesus Christ was not merely the Teacher sent from God. He was the Saviour who came to accomplish man's salvation; and God's Word was the opening up of what was in God's heart, the declaration in deed as well as in word of the eternal love on which alone man can rest. This communion between God and man is seen throughout all Scripture which records or conveys it—but the communion is one thing and the record is another.

3. *Their formal as opposed to a religious idea of the infallibility and authority of Scripture.* According to the Princeton School, the infallibility and authority or Divine authorship of the Bible seem to depend on its being an errorless record of matters God designs to communicate, and this inerrancy is due to a continued superintendence of God. This superintendence they call Inspiration. This is very clearly put in the admirable article by Dr. Hodge and Dr. Warfield already referred to, and it seems also taught in the Systematic Theology of Dr. Charles Hodge.¹ The article in the *Princeton Review* is deservedly cele-

¹ *Presbyterian Review*, vol. ii., p. 232. *Systematic Theology*, i., pp. 153, 155.

brated. It is written with great breadth of view, and is one of the ablest treatises on the special theory of Inspiration it defends that can be met with in the round of modern theology. The authors select one of the many theories of Inspiration, define it clearly, and proceed to apply their definition with great skill and sagacity. According to these writers, it would appear that Inspiration largely takes the place of the old reformed doctrine of Scripture, and in this they follow Dr. Charles Hodge, who devotes a few lines to the doctrine of Scripture, and nearly thirty pages to a doctrine of Inspiration. Inspiration is thus defined—"God's continued work of superintendence by which, His providential gracious and supernatural contributions having been presupposed, He presided over the sacred writers in their entire work of writing with the design and effect of rendering that writing an errorless record of the matters He designed them to communicate, and hence constituting the entire volume in all its parts the Word of God to us." The essence of Inspiration, we are told, is superintendence, a superintendence exercised upon the writers of Scripture by the Holy Spirit, and the result of this superintendence is to secure a book free from all error, whether of fact, or precept, or doctrine. This inerrancy is infallibility, and this infallibility gives Scripture its authority and testifies to its Divine Authorship.

It is not quite certain whether the authors of the article mean to use the technical term "inspired" to denote the writers of Scripture or the works written by them. They would probably apply it to both, but primarily to the writers. The writers were under the superintendence of the Holy Spirit, and the books were written by men under this superintendence. What corresponds to inspiration in the writers is inerrancy in the writings. Thus the inerrancy of Scripture is its characteristic, which is the test both of its infallibility and of its Divine origin. We are, of

course, told that the truth of Christianity is independent of Inspiration. "Revelation came in large part before the record of it, and the Christian Church before the New Testament";¹ but the truth of Christianity is one thing and Scripture is another, and it is Scripture that we are now concerned with.

I trust that I have not misrepresented the theory I am trying to state. If not, then the special and distinctive characteristic of Scripture is inerrancy; and when we speak of the infallibility of the Bible, we mean that it contains not even the slightest or most trivial error. Now I ask, is this a theory which can be called religious in the deepest sense of the word? Inerrancy makes no appeal to heart or conscience. It cannot touch the deep springs of sinful human nature. I do not mean to discuss the question of fact. For my own part, I do not care to use "error" as applied to the Bible, but this whole question of the formal inerrancy of Scripture seems to me to be trivial in the extreme. My sense of the infallibility of the Bible is in no way affected by the knowledge that while the author of the Second Book of Samuel says that David bought the threshing floor and oxen of Ornan for fifty shekels of silver, the author of the First Book of Chronicles says that the price was 600 shekels of gold.² I say simply that there is some discrepancy here: how the mistake arose I do not know and I do not much care (*nec anxie laboro*).³ I do not go to Scripture to learn the price of threshing floors and oxen. I go to learn God's wonderful dealings with David, to see the sins, and repentance, and faith, of the man after God's own heart. The purchase of the threshing floor has its place in all this. It is no bit of dead history. It is part of David's biography, and that is all living to me because throughout it all God is with him, promising, commanding,

¹ *Princeton Review*, ii. p. 227.

² 2 Sam. xxxiv. 24; 1 Chron. xxi. 35.

³ Calvin, Com. on Matt. xxvii. 9.

comforting, warning, so that we see how throughout all Jehovah is his covenant God. The small verbal discrepancies, errors if you will, in Samuel and Chronicles are nothing to me: formal inerrancy, if proved, would not make these works more a part of Scripture than they are at present. Infallibility does not consist in formal inerrancy at all, but in the power which compels me to know that God is through this Scripture speaking to me now as He spoke not merely *by* the prophets and holy men of old, but *to* them and in them, and giving me through them in word and picture the message of His salvation.

But whatever my private opinions may be, the formal idea of infallibility which makes it to consist in verbal inerrancy was not that of the Reformers, nor is it the view of the Westminster Confession. The Reformers did not take Inspiration to mean a Divine superintendence exercised over the writers of Scripture in order to produce an errorless record. When they spoke of Inspiration in a strictly technical sense, they applied it to the writings and not to the writers of Scripture. It was the writing that was *theopneustos*, breathed of God, or inspired. This is the use of the word in all the Reformed Confessions, and is its use in the Westminster Confession of Faith. The Canonical Scriptures are inspired, the Apocrypha are not: the Scriptures in the original tongue are immediately inspired, versions are mediately inspired.¹ The use of the word in the Confession follows strictly its use in the proof-text, which tells us how to profit by every inspired Scripture. The universal line of thought is that Scripture is inspired because it conveys the authoritative and infallible Word of God: it is not infallible and authoritative because it is inspired. Hence in the Reformed statements on the doctrine of Scripture, whether in the writings of theologians or in creeds, a theory of Inspiration is seldom

¹ West. Conf., I. 2, 3, 8.

or never given, and what fills the place which that now occupies in the writings of the Princeton School is the doctrine of the witness of the Spirit. The space occupied by their theory of Inspiration proves how thoroughly the Princeton theologians have abandoned the religious for a formal estimate of Scripture. For with the Reformers it is the Word of God which is primarily infallible and authoritative, and Scripture or the record is infallible and authoritative only because it is the record of the infallible Word. The Princeton theory of Inspiration is an attempt to bestow on Scripture, primarily and in itself, qualities which it really possesses, but possesses only because it is the record of God's words to men and of his dealings with them.

Calvin does not require a theory of Divine superintendence which has for its object to produce an errorless record. He asks in the *Institutes* how we can get at the complete credibility and authority of Scripture, and answers that we can only do so when we learn that God is the Author. Then he shows in that wonderful seventh chapter of his how we get this knowledge, and ends by saying, "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.*"¹ The Scriptures are infallible and authoritative because the witness of the Spirit in and with the Word in our hearts, assures us that in these Scriptures God still speaks to us; or, as the old Scotch Confession says in Scripture, the "true kirk alwaies heares and obeyes the voice of her awin Spouse and Pastor."² This is a religious theory of infallibility and authority very different from the merely

¹ *Instit.*, i. 7, 5.

² Art. 19.

formal ideas of the Princeton School, and it is the doctrine of the Westminster Confession, which says that the infallibility of Scripture is something recognised by faith. Faith is not required to recognise inerrancy. Inerrancy, if it exists, is merely a matter of fact to be recognised by the ordinary reason. But the infallibility which compels the conviction that God is speaking to us infallibly, telling us that if we hear and accept this Saviour we shall infallibly be saved, requires faith. And that is the infallibility which the Bible possesses and which man needs.

Of course the Scriptures must be a suitable record of the Divine Revelation, and the Westminster Confession, following in the footsteps of the Reformers, has a theory of Divine superintendence exercised over this record. It is a very different kind of superintendence, however, from that assumed by the Princeton School in their singular theory of Inspiration. Its object was not to ensure a formally errorless record, nor did it cease when the writers had finished the original autographs of the Scriptural writings. It is now going on, and is to go on "in all ages." The Scriptures have been framed and preserved in such a way under "the singular care and providence of God" that they are suited for whatever use God assigns them to have among men.¹ They have been preserved in such a fashion that the Church has had "in all ages" a "pure and authentical" record of the Word of God. If it be asked how such terms can be applied to a record which gives two different accounts of the price paid for the threshing floor of Ornan, or how we can trust a record in the greater things which leaves us in doubt about some small matters of fact, we can only answer that God has not withheld from this imperfect record the witness of His Spirit, commending it to us as His own pure authentical and infallible declaration of redeeming love, and as His own

¹ Chap. i. 8.

perfect rule of faith and life. Formal inerrancy is not required to make Scripture the pure and authentic Word of God. That this singular care and providence has been exercised, is abundantly evident in the history of the Scripture records; may I say that we can now discern its workings in the Textual and Historical interpretation of Scripture which are features of our age?

4. *Their still more formal relegation of the strict infallibility of Scripture to unknown and unknowable original autographs of Scripture.* The Princeton School practically infers that the Scriptures as we have them now are not a formally errorless record. They do so with certain reservations in which most people will agree. They point out the marvellous and minute accuracy in all manner of historical and geographical details which characterise the Holy Scriptures, and which give them a unique position among writings which have descended to us from a remote past.¹ They lay down some simple canons for testing so-called errors or mistakes, and with most of these I thoroughly agree.² They are indignant with critics who do not judge Scripture as they would other books, perhaps forgetting that the claim they themselves make for absolute inerrancy may have something to do in provoking what they object to. But when all is said they are bound to admit that the attribute of formal inerrancy does not belong to the Scriptures which we now have, but to what they call “the *ipsissima verba* of the original autographs” of Scripture when these are interpreted in their natural and intended sense.³ It follows that the Scriptures as we now have them are neither infallible nor inspired in their use of these words. This is not an inference drawn from their writings by a hostile critic. It is frankly and courageously said by themselves, “We do not assert that the common text, but

¹ *Princeton Review*, ii. pp. 250, 251.

² *Ibid.*, ii. pp. 245-6.

³ *Ibid.*, ii. p. 233.

only that the original autographic text was inspired." The statement is deliberately made by Dr. Hodge and Dr. Warfield.¹ This is a very grave assertion, and shows to what lengths the School are driven to maintain their theory, and it is one which cannot fail, if seriously believed and thoroughly acted upon, to lead to sad conclusions both in the theological doctrine of Scripture and in the practical work of the Church. It shows where necessity drives men who start with ignoring the great Reformation thought, and go back to the mediæval idea of what Scripture is. The mediæval Church began with the idea that what was given in Scripture was accurate information on doctrine and morals and the Roman Catholic Church has ended with an errorless Scripture, the Vulgate, where inerrancy is guaranteed by the authority of the Church. Where are we to get our errorless Scripture? In the *ipsissima verba* of the original autographs. Who are to recover these for us? I suppose the band of experts in textual criticism who are year by year giving us the materials for a more perfect text. Are they to be created by-and-by when their labours are ended into an authority doing for Protestants what the "Church" does for Roman Catholics? Are they to guarantee for us the inspired and infallible Word of God, or are we to say that the unknown autographs are unknowable, and that we can never get to this Scripture, which is the only Scripture inspired and infallible in the strictly formal sense of those words as used by the Princeton School? I have a great respect for textual and historical Biblical critics, and have done my share in a humble way to obtain a recognition of their work, but I for one shall never consent to erect the scholars whom I esteem into an authority for that text of Scripture which is alone inspired and infallible. That, however, is what this formalist theory is driving us to if we submit to it.

¹ *Princeton Review*, ii. p. 245.

I maintain, with all the Reformers, and with all the Reformed Creeds, that the Scriptures, *as we now have them*, are the inspired and infallible Word of God, and that all textual criticism, while it is to be welcomed in so far as it brings our present text nearer the *ipsissima verba* of the original autographs, will not make the Scriptures one whit more inspired or more infallible in the true Scriptural and religious meanings of those words than they are now; for infallibility is not formal inerrancy, but what produces the conviction of infallibly saving power. It is because I believe that the Bible *as we now have it* is the inspired and infallible Word of God that I can take it as my guide for this life and for the life beyond; that I can preach from it; that I can put it into the hands of unbelievers, and of heathen. And if I am asked why I receive Scripture as the Word of God and as the perfect rule of faith and life, then certainly I do not answer: Because it is the slightly imperfect copy of original autographs, which, if I could only get at them, I could show you to be absolutely errorless writings. I answer—Because the Bible is the only record of the redeeming love of God, because in the Bible alone I find God drawing near to man in Christ Jesus, and declaring to us in Him His will for our salvation. And this record I know to be true by the witness of His Spirit in my heart in and with the Word, whereby I am assured that none other than God Himself is able to speak such words to my soul. This is the answer of all the Reformers, and it was also the answer of the Puritans—of Luther, and Calvin, and Knox, and John Owen. It is the answer of Dr. Charles Hodge himself when he is not writing formal systematic but experimental theology,¹ when he is dealing not with theological formulæ but with living men and women.

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¹ Cf. Hodge: *Way of Life*.