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ARTICLE IV.

THE IMPORTANCE AND LIMITATIONS OF THE
HISTORICAL ARGUMENT.¹

BY PROFESSOR ALBERT TEMPLE SWING.

WHEN a man enters the realm of research, and of argumentation over the results of investigation, it is of vital importance that he hold the fundamental principles of knowledge with very great clearness. Facts and theories, the real and the ideal, *without the right method*, will accumulate in ever-increasing confusion. The more one seems to know, the less he actually possesses of true knowledge.

The historical instinct seeks to discover what has been in the past, and the manner of that being. What has been done and what has been thought; how it was done and how it was thought, are the questions which are ever arising. It is a search after reality as it has manifested itself to life and in life. The primal question is, What can be known? and the primary object of this paper is to emphasize the importance of distinguishing between that which belongs to the true record of history, and that which is only inferred from it; between facts, and theories as to facts; between science in its original and strict sense, and mere speculation, or science falsely so called.² Human teaching can possess no inherent

¹ Opening address before the Theological Seminary, Oberlin, September 20, 1894.

² It is largely a question as to method. No attempt is here made to *locate* the line of division between certainty, probability, and possibility. An absolute theory of knowledge has never yet been successfully formulated. Every attempt thus far has led to divisions and confusion. Kant, the greatest of all contributors in this direction, is yet the most conspicuous failure of all.

authority. It is authoritative only as it presents truth, or reality, as it exists in the physical and spiritual worlds. So soon as a man's facts are exhausted, so soon as he has drawn upon all the truth he has in his possession, his function as a teacher sent from God ceases, and he must hasten frankly to declare, as Paul did, *I do not have this of the Lord; these are my own private inferences.*

Now the truth is, that what we absolutely and definitely know of past reality is limited. The record is incomplete as to its extent, and not absolutely correct in what it presents. It is only the human record of the real. It is the account of what has been seen and handled, so far as it has been preserved for us. For all practical purposes this kind of an account is abundantly adequate. It is not microscopic analysis which is demanded here. The world is wisely content if the general results have been obtained from honest witnesses. If further demands are made, they must be satisfied from other sources, if satisfied at all. Such is the nature of the historical record that we accept it as capable of furnishing genuine knowledge. The man who becomes so extremely sceptical as to doubt the possibility of genuine history in the past has nothing behind him upon which he can build; and, in like manner, he can have nothing before him for his thought. His infidelity is practical insanity.

But the incompleteness of the historical record is a fact of equal importance with its genuineness. The true history stops with the record. All the remainder of the past world, so far as our knowledge goes, lies in silence. It is the great unknown. It stands to us, and must ever stand to us, in exactly the same relation, so far as knowledge is concerned, as does the future beyond our own lifetime. Outside of the recorded history behind us, and of the personal experience before us, we have not history but inference; and if we step beyond this, we have not knowledge but pure speculation. It is also necessary to emphasize the fact that the so-called

historical record has not in every particular been found infallible. Some things have been accepted as history which we know to be not history.

On the other hand, it is also equally true that many things only inferred, without absolutely historical evidence, are true. All so-called history has not been history; and all speculative inferences are not mere subjective fancies without reality behind them. But here is a distinction which is fundamental and all-important. It is only necessary for history to demonstrate the fact that it is *genuine history*, in order to become absolutely authoritative. It is necessary for speculation to demonstrate, *in some way outside itself*, that it is more than speculation. Just here a fatal indistinctness has entered into the deepest questions of human life. In seeking to discover past reality the historical factor, and not the philosophical, must hold sway. The ideal may very well be sought elsewhere, but this is not to be its realm. Here the inquiry is for the real in experience, or in fact. It is not to discover what might have been, but what has been.

In this age of subjectiveness and of fertility in speculative dialectic, it is time to remind ourselves that the gaps of history are to remain gaps unless they can be filled by history itself. The artist who ambitiously restored one of the noted statues of Apollo by placing a lyre in the broken hand, had need to be shown later that the wanting member had actually held in it a bow, from which had just been shot the swift-flying arrow. And as to the Apollo Belvedere, it is now discovered that he did not hold a bow in his left hand, but an ægis with the terrorizing head of Medusa upon it.¹ The question in art history is not, whether some one could be found who could paint a "Last Supper" better than Leonardo has done. The faded and scarred original stands best untouched by the modern brush. The child's astronomical

¹ Grundriss der Kunstgeschichte, von Wilhelm Lübke (Stuttgart, 1892), Erster Band, p. 191.

remark, that "the stars would have covered the whole heavens if they had been spread out, so the astronomers gathered them up into constellations," is suggestive of what has often been actually undertaken by the speculative reconstructor of past events.

The historical argument needs to be better understood and more carefully applied in all the general fields of inquiry. For the purpose of illustrating and further unfolding the principles already indicated, some of these may properly be alluded to briefly in this article:—

1. The first of these is that of History proper. All that has in the past been believed to be historical is not, as we have learned, been really historical. On too slender evidence things were called facts which were not facts. What is to be done here? The whole ground of history is being retraversed. All possible lights are being turned upon all possible phases of the past. The most rigid tests are being applied to the statements of the writers of history. The question is not only what is said, *but also what was known when it was said.* Just how many and how important are the facts from which the conclusions have been drawn? History is being dissolved, and only the original elements are desired for the new product. If the facts are not sufficient for the old conclusions, the verdict is unhesitatingly rendered, that the record may be true, *but it is not proved true.* The events in question *may* have happened, *but they have no place in established history;* they are "under consideration," and, unless something else can be brought into the line of supporting testimony, they must forever remain as non-historical.

But just here must come in the ceaseless caution against drawing a false inference from this situation. No fact which lacks historically acceptable proof is thereby proved in itself to be improbable. We cannot say, for this reason, that the statement is false, or that the event never occurred. What stands must be proved untrue by other facts before it be-

comes *unhistorical*: and to deny authoritatively, requires the same degree of knowledge as to affirm. An unsupported denial of what has been asserted on, what appears to us, insufficient evidence, is not so strong as the original affirmation; for we may believe that the original historian may have had in his possession other means of knowledge than those mentioned by him. And so the presumption will remain with the honest "writer of history at-first-hand" till the facts are forthcoming for final proof or effective denial.

We are in no special way interested personally in the question of whether there were two Homers; or two John Wyclifs; or whether Shakespeare wrote *Shakespeare*; or whether there was a historical William Tell. But when a rigid historical inquiry is directed to the first three centuries of the Christian era, the results immediately become of personal importance to every intelligent Christian. What is the evidence for believing that here all is historical which has been believed to be so? Did the apostolic fathers write the books they have been credited with writing? Are the documents of the New Testament historical? Some of the most significant work in recent times has been done here. Students who are just coming into the great fields of thought need to know the spirit of the doing, and the inferences which are to be drawn from it all. What the present generation of investigators pronounce to be historical we may have a new confidence in, *just in proportion to the rigidity of the principles of inquiry.*

I may here say, in passing, that, to my thought, the historical foundation of the Christian religion was never more clearly demonstrated than after the most thorough investigation that has ever been directed into the realm of history. Most of the Epistles were evidently written before the year 70. And if the Gospels as we have them were used already in a written form before the year 160 A. D. to furnish material for compiling certain Gospel narratives which in part have

come down to us;¹ and if these facts have been accepted as historical under the modern tests of inquiry, then the Gospel documents are shown to stand within the realm of history.

But just here is manifested the importance of a clear understanding of the inferences to be drawn from the situation. As the rigidity of the investigation is increased by the various historians, and the confidence in what can pass the tests is thereby made stronger, there is an enlarged number of items left with no historical evidence yet known, to support them. Are they for this reason disproved? Nothing of the kind. They simply stand awaiting other evidence. If it should never be forthcoming, because the records have forever perished, the stamp of "historical" would, in the judgment of those investigators, be forever withheld, and that too though the events in question may have once had all the reality of your own existence. What is the argumentative meaning of all this? It is simply that the historical method has its limitations. While it intensifies certainty, it limits the range of that certainty. There is a larger field left to probabilities and presumptions. Circumstantial evidence immediately comes into lively operation. And religious faith must have its place for that which is "probable," as well as that which can be stamped "historical"; but it must be absolutely distinct from the historically established. Every link in the chain of circumstantial evidence may be true to the life, but it may also be false. This method inspires confidence and is covered with confusion. While the man who disputes history without evidence is not only an ignorant man, but a fool, the man who dogmatizes in the realm of the merely probable is a dangerous leader to the ignorant, and a troublesome enthusiast to the wise.

In Germany the varying emphasis placed upon the his-

¹ Besides the Diatessaron of Tatian, see H. B. Swete's Introduction and Notes to *The Akhmim Fragment of the Apocryphal Gospel of Peter*. London and New York: Macmillan & Co. 1893.

torical method has led to a number of distinct phases of religious thought. One class of mind has become sceptically inclined because of what has been left outside their present means of absolute proof, forgetting apparently that a mere "method of proof" cannot in one particular change past events as they have really existed. What has happened, is there, whether it can be proved or not. And there must be a faith in what cannot be proved, because of our faith in what can be proved. A sleeping child is discovered in a basket on a doorstep. The parents of the child may not be found by all the vigilance that the court can exercise: but if the child is not cared for, *it will cease to be a sleeping child, and become a crying child!*

Another type of the German mind has put forth the duty of belief in Christ irrespective of all historical evidence, because of his meeting our spiritual wants. The same investigator who can find no historical proof great enough to bring before him the historical Christ, yet in the church is to turn from this incomplete record of the past, and join with the worshippers in adoring the spiritual Lord whom he knows spiritually and personally. Dr. Reischle, of Giessen, in an essay, entitled, "Faith in Jesus Christ, and the Historical Examination of his Life," declares that, "One cannot delay faith in Christ till historical criticism has settled all its problems." The imperative is to yield to the spiritual Lord, and know of the truth of the doctrine in the soul's own experience. The late Dr. Frank, of Erlangen, while emphasizing the importance of that personal experience directly received in "regeneration" and "conversion" as a means of "assurance,"¹ yet had no complacency in those who directly or indirectly neglect the importance and validity of the historical element in religion.² To him the certainty in the soul was

¹ System der Christlichen Gewissheit, 2 Auf. 2 Bde. Erlangen und Leipzig.

² "Eine brennende Frage," in Neue Kirchliche Zeitschrift, 1894, No. 3.

not independent of the Gospel record of Jesus, and did not leave that record as a matter of indifference. It sealed for him its perfect integrity, validity, and divinity.

It is not possible to understand the religious position of such scholars as Ritschl, Herrmann, Harnack, and Kaftan without a knowledge of their use of the historical method. But for the purposes of illustration it is not necessary to dwell longer here.

2. Let us pass now into the so-called sphere of Science. Scientific investigation has been greatly enlarged in recent years. But here, in the study of the rocks, the observation of animal existence, and the investigation into the physical basis of life, the right use of the historical method is absolutely necessary for the validity of the conclusions. For the question is not, what might be, or what ought to be; but what is, and what has been. In geology, biology, and physiological psychology fact must be absolutely separated from inference; and both fact and the inferences drawn from fact must be forever distinct from the great mass of mere philosophical speculations. The real strength of these departments will lie primarily in the array of authenticated facts, and only secondarily in the skill of the dialectic used in the realm of the inferential, and in that of the purely speculative which lies beyond these facts.

(1) Geology in its rich field has its work to do in discovering and verifying. But science finds it a limited field, and speculation, as well as inference, must soon be brought into play, if there is an attempt to tell us the particulars of what has happened in the ages of the past. If, however, we clearly hold in mind here the limitations of the historical method; we need not be thrown into confusion when one scientist tells us that a certain event took place ten thousand years ago, and another gives us to understand that the event in question occurred a million years in the past. A discrepancy of nine hundred and ninety thousand years, in a consid-

eration where there are no facts in the way, ought not to trouble any one. It is only when we come back to the rational definition of science that discrepancies are seriously worth considering.

The world of speculation is a free world; and it is free because no man can speak with authority in it. Authority in the sphere of the historical goes only with the verities of history; and where these cease to be verities, authority ceases and freedom comes in. Everything may have been in the fire mist just as truly as if the geologist had been there to make a diagram or take a photograph of the situation; but by the historical argument it can never be demonstrated. It must therefore, for us, stand only in the realm of the probable or possible. New evidence may come in to increase or diminish our confidence in its truth; or, inasmuch as it is not a purely scientific conclusion, it may be completely changed by later science, just as science or verified knowledge reversed the universal belief that the sun revolved about the earth. When it comes to inferences and speculations, the geologist has no more liberty, and scarcely more power, than any other speculator. Certainly the moment he steps *beyond his facts* he loses his pre-eminence. A philosopher who could not tell sandstone from granite may easily become his superior in the realm of pure speculation.

(2) Biologists also find vast fields for their research. But a mist has gathered here, because of a failure to distinguish between fact and fancy. The naturalist has gathered his facts with noble enthusiasm, but these, after all, are to be significant only in their own sphere. The moment any deductions are made *beyond the centre of gravity of these facts*, so to speak, those deductions are of no scientific value. It is not history that is then given us, but assumption. Any one is at equal liberty to assume differently; and no man can assume authoritatively. Some persons forget, apparently, that the development "theory" in its absolute form is not a "devel-

opment fact." Science has not told us by the purely historical method that everything has developed from something below it. The verified facts of all the investigators in these fields are not sufficient to show, whether things have developed wholly upwards, or in part downwards; or whether they began in the middle, so to speak, and developed both ways; or whether, outside the limit of species, there is a development in either direction.¹ The development theory when applied to the whole universe of matter and mind, the organic and the inorganic, is absolutely untenable without admitting a series of unexplained introductions, or of additions by creation, which would modify it so fundamentally as to destroy its primary and literal force.

(3) Those who have been searching to find the elements of life and spirit in matter have never been able to find them. They find matter in motion, but, from the very nature of the investigation, they find nothing more. They have no instruments for anything more. The physiological psychologists can only push their investigations, under more favorable circumstances, one step further into the delicate realm where the molecules are moved. They can locate the source from which the motion proceeds; they can measure its strength: but the animating energy itself forever eludes them. No new introduction of names can cover their defeat or solve the mysteries of "life."

But what are to be our inferences from all this here? It is true that those last substances upon which the physiologist can do his work are properly called only the "physical basis" of life and spirit. But out of the situation there is always arising, not a presumption, but an assumption, that, because nothing but matter can be discovered, therefore there is not a duality of matter *and* spirit, but a monality of matter alone. The physiological scientist and those who follow

¹ See Sir William Dawson's latest work, *Some Salient Points in the Science of the Earth*. New York: Harper Bros. 1894.

his lead are to be bound by the limitations of the historical argument. They can truly say that they find only matter in motion. Did any rational man, understanding the instruments with which they must work, ever expect anything more? Can it be said that there is therefore no spiritual existence in connection with matter, or apart from it? By no manner of reasoning. *All such investigations can never create a presumption against spiritual realities.* Is there no mind because we cannot find it with the probe? Is there no personal God because science cannot find him in the universe? As well affirm that there is no architect of the palace because he is not discoverable in the building. Physical science finds its sphere in the physical side of existences, and there its authority will depend upon the exactness of its work. It can only demonstrate that matter conditions spirit, as well as that spirit influences matter; or, in other words, that the shape of the potato will be determined in part by the obstacles in the soil.

On the other hand, however, President Stanley Hall declares¹ that he has not been able to enumerate a dozen materialists among contemporary writers, and of these only two are academic; and he affirms that the present tendency in science is toward dynamic views of matter, rather than to the materialistic views of force. If this be true, and many of the recent followers of Herbert Spencer would seem to bear out the claim, it will be just as necessary in the future to insist upon the validity and importance of the historical argument for science as it has been necessary in the past to call attention to its limitations. There is certainly no less to be said against a monality of force and spirit in the universe, than against a monality of matter. It is not a legitimate limitation of the historical argument when, for any purpose whatever, facts of importance on either side of a question are ignored.

¹ "The New Psychology as a Basis of Education," *Forum*, August, 1894.

Mr. Benjamin Kidd's great point is in showing that science has made a *fundamental omission* in failing to estimate the great fact of religion. He says:¹ "What then are the religious systems which fill such a commanding place in man's life and history? What is their meaning and function in social development? To ask these questions is to find that a strange silence has fallen upon Science. She cannot answer. Her attitude toward them has been curious in the extreme, and widely different from that in which she has regarded any other of the phenomena of life. . . . These religious phenomena are certainly among the most persistent and characteristic features of the development which we find man undergoing in society. . . . Yet contemporary literature may be searched almost in vain for evidence of any true realization of this fact. Even the attempt made by Mr. Herbert Spencer in his *Sociology* to deal with the phenomena of religions can scarcely be said to be conceived in the spirit of evolutionary science as now understood. It is hard to follow the author in his theories of the development of religious beliefs from ghosts, and ancestor worship, without a continued feeling of disappointment and even impatience at the triviality and comparative insignificance of the explanations offered to account for the development of such an imposing class of social phenomena." To Mr. Kidd this failure of evolutionary science to give due regard to the historical factor has not only weakened, but vitiated, its conclusions.

3. In Literary and Biblical Criticism the historical argument has, in like manner, a special need of recognition. The impulse for greater exactness in the scrutiny of literary and artistic work as a means of determining authorship and time of production, is but a part of the increased interest in historical exactness in general. In its best form it is helped along by a desire to strengthen insufficient historical evidence, or to help to determine the character of that evidence. When

¹ Social Evolution, pp. 19-22.

an old painting or an ancient piece of sculpture is brought to light, it is the aim of "criticism," not by *a priori* reasoning, but by legitimate comparison with works of known antiquity and authorship, to determine whether it is possible to classify the new-comer with any degree of confidence. Or a manuscript is found, which in the light of what is already known in this field, and not by the mere subjective mental state of the inquirer, is located with great confidence, or on the other hand with many improbabilities about it. *If the testimony in its behalf is not historical, as well as critical, it can never come to be in itself a direct historical authority.*

This great activity in seeking to determine by criticism what is genuine, and what is not genuine, has been extended more directly into the realm of religion. But here there is also a biblical and religious criticism, *which seeks, largely by methods of its own, to determine the authorship and genuineness of our religious books and the character of their teachings.* It is important to know how to estimate the real scientific value of this branch of investigation. It is understood at the outset, and from its very nature, that it is critical, and therefore not historical. It appeals not to well-authenticated testimony, but to *a priori* reasons, and to appearances. *Standing alone, it can therefore never be authoritative.* These critical judgments furnish *presumptions*, as working hypotheses; and standing alone they can never be anything else in the courts of evidence but presumptions.¹ Literary critical argument is therefore to be distinguished from the historical method. The two do not conflict with each other necessarily or primarily. They may indeed work together as well as otherwise. But they generally work apart. In other words, where the historical argument is strongest and most complete, the literary critical is least workable. The literary critical has the best field where there is a marked lack of his-

¹ German historians have in frequent use the word *Foraussetzungen*, which is generally translated "presuppositions."

torical evidence. The less that is known, the more attractive is the field. For that which is historically established cannot be overthrown by the disagreement with it of the literary: and when it simply reaffirms what is already proved to be true this new aid is practically superfluous. It is, nevertheless, true that the critical method has added to, and taken from, that which has been accepted as *quasi* history, but only because these controverted points were recognized as lacking in evidence. But it must be kept just as clearly in mind, that, while criticism may lead us to reject *quasi* history, it can never take the place of real history. It can create distrust; with much greater difficulty can it build up faith. A work whose genuineness is assumed on reasonable literary evidence is not historically established. It rests not on reasonable historical proof, but on reasonable literary conjecture. Its truth is a presumption, but the best presumption in the world can be completely dissipated by the discovery of one genuine historical fact.

As literary criticism is primarily only the application of the judgment to appearances, it cannot alone detect a perfect forgery; and, on the other hand, the appearances of forgery, or of artificial compilation, may be equally misleading. A man will often not be able to identify some of his own productions without the aid of the chirography. He does not remember them. They do not "sound like him." But there they are, in his own handwriting and stored away among his treasures. If a hundred of an ordinary man's sermons should be disguised by a typewriter, and then subjected to the usual critical methods, not a few of them would very likely be declared to be weak imitations, if not positive forgeries! If a style of argument be applied to the Pentateuch which, when applied in the same manner, e. g., to the Epistle to the Romans,¹ would demonstrate several original writers besides

¹ See *Romans Dissected*. By E. D. McReaisham (*Prof. Charles Marsh Mead*). Edinburgh: T. T. Clark. 1891.

Paul, then the presumptive value of such a Pentateuchal argument is shown to be inconclusive, and a too literal application of it might even come to appear ridiculous. For what shall we say of that criticism which, in the name of science, proposes to itself, without the aid of any outside facts whatever, to take up some of the oldest records of the race and not only point out for us the original elements out of which the book in question is supposed to have been blunderingly constructed, but even to readjust those elements as they ought to have been used!¹ Biblical criticism employs the historical method when it searches out the facts in the use of Jehovah and of Elohim, or the references to angels in the book of Daniel, etc. It abandons the solid foundations underneath it and steps off into speculations, *when it goes beyond the facts of the Bible without placing its feet upon other facts outside the Bible*. That there were other documents than those preserved in the Old Testament is affirmed in the Bible itself. For "is it not written in the book of Jasher?"² But what we do not know about these other documents would fill several volumes; while what we do know about them, if the truth must be told, is absolutely nothing! Speculation is free here, and it will be usually ingenious and usually confusing. If light is ever to break in with direct rays it will probably have to come from discoveries, which yet may be made, when the world gets hold of that which is now lying-buried out of sight.

The so-called "inductive method" of Bible study has set before itself the commendable aim of seeking to bring forth results new and old out of Scripture. But it may be affirmed, without casting any reproach upon this valuable method of study, that some of the greatest questions cannot

¹ Rev. B. W. Bacon in his *Genesis of Genesis* very concisely shows how radical some of the work has been in this direction. See also Professor Howard Osgood's article in *Bib. Sac.*, Oct., 1894, pp. 684-694.

² Josh. x. 13; 2 Sam. i. 18. Compare also Ex. xvii. 14; Num. xxi. 14; 1 Sam. x. 25; 1 Kings xi. 41.

be settled by inductive reasoning. The inductive method used in Scripture interpretation cannot determine whether Scripture itself is genuine or not. It cannot make a legend into history, or turn a history into legend; nor can it get out of Scripture what is not in it. Of all methods of reasoning, it furnishes the least room for magic or mysticism. Now the facts necessary for the success of this method, and which must be found outside the Scripture record, are largely wanting; while the events recorded in Scripture itself are in many cases the very ones which the so-called induction is being used to discuss. But the propositions upon which all perfect induction must ever depend, if it can draw any valid conclusions whatever, cannot themselves be decided in the process. I venture upon a practical illustration:—

One of the most prominent leaders in this department of instruction,¹ after applying his inductive method to the "fall of man as recorded in Genesis," concludes without qualification or limitation, that the writer "has no thought of geography or history. He asks simply, How can I best impress these truths upon the minds of men? He does what the prophet always does, he idealizes. There is here no history, no geography." This conclusion, which is the very kernel of one of the great subjects now under discussion, he has arrived at immediately without awaiting for the introduction of any newly discovered fact. For, What is known, one is moved to ask in astonishment, that can bring us so absolutely and easily to that which a moment before was either accepted as containing the truth as it stands; or if it is not true, *then unknown, and to be found out?* At the very outset he assumed in his fifth principle laid down for testing the biblical stories of creation that which is itself under discussion, viz:—that the writer of Genesis compiled his accounts from "four distinct elements, no one of which goes further back than 950

¹ President Harper in a masterly article in *Biblical World*, March, 1894.

B. C." In that case Genesis itself (which is all we have in historical existence(?)) must have been written by some one who lived much later than 950 A. D. (i. e., 662 B. C. (?)) and therefore the probability against his being able to give anything of original historical value is so strong as to make it practically impossible.

The inductive method working alone would hardly be able to establish this "improbability" from Genesis itself, *for Genesis reads exactly like an attempt to give history and geography:—*

Gen. ii. 8-17.—"And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed. . . . And a river went out of Eden to water the garden; and from thence it was parted, and became into four heads. The name of the first is Pison: that is it which compasseth the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold; and the gold of that land is good: there is bdellium and the onyx stone," etc.

Could an "idealizer" be excused on any scientific grounds, for going so far out of his way as to employ six of the ten verses in this paragraph to describe a purely fictitious geography? Not when he wrote his fiction so much like history that it took over two thousand years to discover its true character. Our inductive leader has been using several methods here. So that, instead of getting out of Genesis what is in Genesis, he has given us just what is in his "fifth principle" for the interpretation of Genesis! It has certainly not been demonstrated by the introduction of any new evidence that the account in Genesis may not have been an honest and straightforward attempt to describe events as the writer *believed* them to have occurred. Or, if the poetical and dramatic element has entered with the narrative, nothing is brought forward to prove the impossibility of believing that it is a poetical statement of an actual fall in the historical location mentioned, whether we to-day can identify the location or not. It is not logic, and it is not science which affirms an interpretation to be the only one when the same method will

establish several other interpretations with no less a degree of certainty.

4. Religious Philosophy is assuming, in certain quarters, a positiveness and an independence in teaching that reminds one strongly of the palmiest day of rationalism. Professor Pfléiderer, of Berlin, is one of the noblest representatives of this type of mind. It is dogmatically affirmed by various members of this class, as if it were intuitive truth, that 'the supernatural and the miraculous do not happen. Jesus moved in the sphere of the Jewish conceptions of his own time:—a kingdom of God and a judgment to come, angels and devils, heaven and hell. These Jewish ideas formed the narrow horizon which shut him in, and out of which we are to break into the larger liberty of dogmatic subjectivism! The resurrection of Jesus Christ was only spiritual and not physical. The story of the evangelists is evidently the result of spiritual enthusiasm. If we knew more, we could point out the original germs of truth in that which we have to admit reads like a simple narrative of history, but which we know *a priori* never took place! Possibly there was some sort of an original Moses. There might have been an historical Solomon, but he never compiled the Proverbs: and a David who may possibly have written one or two psalms. The prophecies must have been written after the events; or they did not refer to the future as it happened except by an unallowable post-adaptation.'

The *ipse dixit* declarations of this subjective method of teaching do not generally aim to leave more things established but less. They are more successful in denying than affirming; in destroying faith than in building it up. But with a man who has the historical sense developed in his soul they are less calculated to disturb faith than to awaken repugnance. The dogmatizings of rationalism, like the vagaries of speculation, are mental activities in which every man is at liberty to indulge if he wishes to do so. But he need not seriously

trouble the world with the product. Such work is not science, nor is it scientific. It is not even rational when it makes the fallible dictates of one's own mind the authoritative centre, in place of the testimony of history and in the very face of it.

The object of this paper, so far as it has any practical reference to the religious and scientific discussions of the present day, has been to emphasize liberty, which has too often been denied by party conservatism; and at the same time to indicate the desirability of having a wholesome restraint placed upon that dogmatism which is too common in the advanced schools of thought. In holding to the simplest illustration of the theme there has yet been the constant aim to show that the historical method does not belong to history alone, but to every department of human thought and knowledge. The growing scrutiny into the so-called "historical" in every field of thought, may crowd it into still narrower limits, and no harm will come, if the situation be understood. It will only be to magnify the strength and legitimacy of its authority. There is much that needs to be restated and reinforced in science and philosophy, in New Testament views and Old Testament views, and there should be absolute freedom for the honest and legitimate doing of the work. We owe it in these difficult fields to recognize the careful scholar and to encourage him in his work. Under his leadership we shall certainly be taught to distinguish conclusions proved, from conclusions which are more or less fanciful, and do not conclude at all. Truth needs truth to enlarge its liberty and give it dominion, and the man who is afraid of new truth does not know anything about truth at all, for truth is really all of the same age.

But the work should be carried on in such a way as to inspire confidence and not distrust. We shall not help either the old or the new, by running off into vagaries. The alarming amount of unscientific work put forth rapidly and

easily in these fields, with all the positiveness of new truth; the clothing of the merest assumptions and fancies in the garb of reality, and putting them forth with all the soberness of historical verities, is not a hopeful sign of the present or for the future. In our desire to satisfy the mind's inborn craving for knowledge, it is important that we do not allow our sober judgment to be defrauded with what is not knowledge,—with what in the business world is called "watered stock." Every "promise to pay" must have the gold or the earth back of it. The man who is so hungry for something new that he is not willing to wait to test it, is in danger of losing his appetite for what he has already in his possession; of disbelieving the old while becoming a credulous enthusiast in respect to the new. He will find himself in the position of one of the English separatists who went on progressing so rapidly that he felt constrained to put into one of his books the caution to his readers, that it was always *his last opinion* which he wished to be taken as "*containing the truth*"!

Theories, and working hypotheses, are necessary and helpful up to a certain point in the investigation, and have done their part in advancing knowledge. But when held too closely they more often mislead than lead aright. We have passed the point of safety in more than one direction. It is time to come back and be content with the slower but surer method of discovery, and of enlarging our knowledge of the unknown by a better knowledge of the known. That is true science and that is genuine scholarship. President Bascom well stated the case in one of his books,¹ and the quotation may fittingly be given here in conclusion: "The skill of an intellectual life is found in getting from the old to the new without the loss of either; from the old to the new in government without the waste and overthrow of revolution; from the old to the new in social customs and order, without the

¹ Science, Philosophy, and Religion, p. 26.

shock of aroused prejudices, the bitterness of sarcasm, the irritation of unwelcome truth; from the old to the new in faith, without schism, the falling of this branch into rapid decay, the putting forward of that into precipitate progress; from the old to the new in philosophy without the irreparable loss of complete rejection, or the irreparable loss of unlimited acceptance, without leaping wholly off from the sure foundation of the past on to other foundations of merely fanciful strength, that have not been tested by the storms of many centuries."