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## ARTICLE II.

THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE.<sup>1</sup>

BY PROFESSOR DAVID FOSTER ESTES, D.D.

THE National Congregational Council of 1895 proposed to other Protestant evangelical churches church union based upon: "1. The acceptance of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments inspired by the Holy Spirit, as containing all things necessary for salvation, and as being the rule and ultimate standard of Christian faith." To this statement the Congregational creed of 1883 is closely parallel, which makes the declaration (Art. V.) that the Scriptures "constitute the authoritative standard by which religious teaching and human conduct are to be regulated and judged." Our Congregational brethren, then, both accept the Scriptures as authoritative, as, indeed, the ultimate standard of religious authority, and also lay such stress on this acceptance as to make it the first requisite for church union.

At the same time, however, it cannot be denied that the faith which our Congregational brethren have set in the forefront of their declaration is not to-day the faith of all. Not only do some within the pale of the Protestant evangelical churches to which they appeal, hold this view only loosely and half-heartedly, but there are a few at least who deliberately set aside and reject the authority of Scripture. A teacher of theology, discussing "The Theological Teaching for the Times," lately declared: "The theological task to-day in all Western Christendom is . . . the complete rejection of the false principle of authority.

<sup>1</sup>The opening address at the beginning of the Seminary year, at Hamilton Theological Seminary, September 13, 1897. Copyright, 1898.

. . . Not an infallible church tradition, not an infallible church office, not an infallible canon of Scripture, only religion has sovereign right in the kingdom of religion. To-day faith seeks freedom from these false principles of authority."<sup>1</sup>

Now, while it must be recognized that there exists to-day, to a greater or less degree, a hostility to the authority of Scripture as to all authority in religion, which finds clear expression in the words just quoted, it is also to be remembered that this hostility is so far from being alarming or even surprising, that it is to be expected in view of the natural tendencies of the time. Of course this does not mean that all who may object to the authority of the Scriptures necessarily share all, or indeed any, of the characteristics of the age which are to be noted; but, even though unconsciously to themselves, men may be, must be, affected by the spirit of the age, as by the atmosphere in which they live. Of what sort, then, is the age, to the subtle influence of which we all are unceasingly exposed, and which may be molding us, intellectually and spiritually, even while we consciously resist it?

The past generation has been an era of criticism, and not least as touching the Bible. The text itself of the New Testament has been reconstituted. The need of the same process for the Old is recognized, but as yet scarcely begun. Literary criticism has solved many problems, and discovered many more which await solution; and, while some things which it has said have already been unsaid, yet the influence even of these confessed errors still abides. Biblical Theology, most reverent and constructive of all branches of theological study, has asked more questions than it has answered. There is no occasion of surprise, then, if, in view of the *débris* heaped up by critical processes, men come to inquire whether the value of the Bible

<sup>1</sup> Professor George B. Foster, *Bibl. World*, ix. 1, pp. 24, 25.

has not thus been impaired. It is a matter of course that the Roentgen rays of criticism, which have made the tissues of Scripture transparent, will be, and should be, turned on the skeleton which alone enables it to stand forth a power to the church and the world, its divine authority.

Again, it must be recognized that the intellectual successes of the past generation have brought about an exaggerated, not to say intoxicated, confidence in the all-sufficiency of the same powers and methods in all departments of thought and life. Inductions have been so broad, deductions so safe, forecasts so brilliant, in all the realms of the visible and the material, that it is not surprising that men confidently extend the same processes upward as well as outward, Godward as well as worldward, in complete forgetfulness that the materials of religion are less tangible and more remote than those of science, and that its conclusions are less readily verifiable. The microscope and the retort have told so much, the geologist and the biologist have foretold so much, that it is to be expected that, ignoring necessary distinctions, religion should be treated in the same way; that what cannot be subjected to the tests which are in place in the study of natural science should be disregarded; that what is not verifiable by observation should be rejected. Now the importance of the modern methods and results in the sphere of external nature may be fully recognized, while at the same time they are confined to this their proper sphere; but that this should often fail to happen, is only what is to be expected.

A third reason for anticipating opposition to the authority of Scripture is to be found in the fact that this age is individualistic even to excess. Universal enfranchisement has been sought; but in the endeavor the goal of liberty has not unnaturally been often overpassed, and protest against wrongful authority has been pushed so far as to become rebellion against rightful authority. Proof of this

may be found, if needed, in the warning given this summer by an eminent sociologist, Professor Small, of the University of Chicago, to the assembled teachers of the land, against the "mistaken policy" "of practically leaving to pupils themselves to fix the standard of their own conduct. That is right which they consent to treat as right, and nothing is positively binding upon them unless they agree." "It is mobocracy," he further declares, "to make the individual the court of last resort in matters of conduct. . . . Democracy is saved from being mobocracy by denying anarchism, and maintaining that there are principles of conduct in which the happiness of all is involved, and that the necessity of all demands that if the individual does not respect these principles, he must be made to."<sup>1</sup> At the same time that the sociologist was giving this warning to educators by the lakes, a preacher, Dr. Moxom of Springfield, declared even more solemnly at a religious conference by the sea: "There is another inheritance, that we are in danger of losing,—that of reverence for moral authority, the distinctive characteristic of our fathers, who were incarnated consciences. We . . . must remember that the most precious inheritance is a sense of the sovereignty of the moral law."<sup>2</sup> Since then Professor Charles Eliot Norton is reported to have said: "From all sides we hear complaints of the spirit of lawlessness in the rising generation. And there can be no doubt that the greater independence now allowed to the youth of both sexes than was the case in the past is often abused, and tends to degenerate into willful self-assertion, indifference to the rights and interests of others, and resistance to authority of whatever nature."<sup>3</sup>

It should occasion no surprise that in an age so critical,

<sup>1</sup> Speech at Milwaukee, letter in Chicago Times-Herald.

<sup>2</sup> Report in Christian Register, July 22, 1897.

<sup>3</sup> Press report, August 20, 1897.

so intoxicated with successful intellectual achievements, so independent and individualistic to the verge of anarchy, as we have seen that this is, we are called upon to discuss the question of authority in religion. Resistance to authority is in the air. While wrongful religious authority is being overthrown, we should expect rightful religious authority to be resisted. Which is the wrongful? What, if any, is rightful?

We are thus brought face to face with a question fundamental to the present discussion, Is there room and place in religion for authority? By the great majority an affirmative answer to this question has been assumed, and debate has raged as to where it may reside. This assumption has, indeed, been so common and complete that one must search theological literature a long time even to find a definition of authority. For example, Professor Briggs, in his inaugural address on the very theme, "The Authority of Holy Scripture," nowhere defines it, and his later volume, "The Bible, the Church, and the Reason;" which was intended, wherever necessary, to supplement his earlier contentions, is equally destitute of any attempt to define his conception of authority.

But while the reality and rightfulness of authority in religion has been, and still is, widely assumed, on the other hand the now wide prevalence of the opposite assumption is very forcibly expressed by Balfour, although he does not sympathize with the position which he states. He says, "To assert that the theory of Authority has been for three centuries the main battle-field whereon have met the opposing forces of new thoughts and old" is an exaggeration "only because, at this point at least, victory is commonly supposed to have declared itself decisively in favor of the new," and, to use his language further, "popular discussion and speculation have driven deep the general opinion that authority serves no other purpose in the econ-

omy of nature than to supply a refuge for all that is bigoted and absurd."<sup>1</sup>

We have, then, the spectacle, strange but by no means unparalleled in the history of intellectual conflicts, of two hostile armies, each claiming to hold against the other the same strategic point. On the one side the host is shouting, "Authority is fallen, is fallen!" on the other side the host is comfortably encamped under the shadow of the same fortress of authority, unaware that it has been seriously assaulted. Now it is possible for individuals, even for considerable bodies of men, to be so out of relation to the world in which they are supposed to live that their very camping-ground has unawares been occupied. But in the present case this is inconceivable. The solution of the difficulty is to be found in a difference of definition. When the declarations of the two parties at issue are carefully considered, it will be found that they are treating unlike conceptions of authority; that, consciously or unconsciously, the same word is the sign of two very different ideas, and that this fact explains in great measure at least their opposition, while it also inevitably leads often to fallacy and confusion.

What, then, does and should the word "authority" as used in religious discussions signify? The definition of those who deny that authority is ever rightful in religion, would be, in substance, "arbitrary dictation which demands unthinking obedience." Now this conception has a historical basis. In political history, authority has too often been despotism either of the one or of the many, Might crushing under an iron heel all opposition even of Right itself. Of authority in this sense there have also been too many examples in religious history, when Might has arbitrarily, despotically, violently prescribed opinion and proscribed thought. Against authority as thus regarded, as

<sup>1</sup> A. J. Balfour, *Foundations of Belief*, p. 195.

mere arbitrary Might, as blind, despotic, crushing, paralyzing force, wide and to a large extent successful protest has already been made, in politics, in science, in morals, in religion. It shall find no defense here, for it is indefensible. But it has been easy for many to be beguiled by a word and a name into opposing not only arbitrary Might, wrongful authority, but also such forms of authority as may be rightful, necessary, permanent, even divine. There is danger that the swing of the pendulum will carry political emancipation beyond liberty to anarchy. The result of the same error in morals is thus stated by Seeley: "The Law of Duty remains indeed authoritative, but its authority scarcely seems so awful and unique as formerly."<sup>1</sup> In religion no less than in morals, elements of divine and eternal truth may be shattered and trampled in complete ignorance of their worth, as well as in order that egotistic individualism may the more exalt itself. The denial of any place in religion for arbitrary dictation does not necessarily rule out of religion any and every form of authority. For arbitrary dictation, despotic Might is not all that may and does commonly and properly bear the name authority.

Take up a newspaper of this season, and we may read, in connection with the announcement of the death of a famous educator, the following statement: "He was a leading authority on educational matters throughout Germany." Now does this signify that he was a departmental autocrat, a secretary for education, or a board of regents raised to the highest power, to whose will men were compelled to bow, and whose opinions they were constrained to accept, even contrary to conviction whether intellectual or moral? By no means. Everybody understands that the statement signifies that he was a man whose opinions and teachings influenced men by the very fact that they were his; that he was one whose words and thoughts were recognized as de-

<sup>1</sup>J. R. Seeley, *Natural Religion*, p. 118.



serving and demanding respectful consideration and, indeed, acceptance, unless and until set aside for good reasons. Nor is the use of the word authority with this meaning only occasional and rare. In all the dictionaries it is given in forms substantially similar. In the International, one definition of authority is "influence of character, office, or station, or mental or moral superiority, or the like," and the Standard gives the following: "the power derived from intellectual or moral superiority, from reputation, or from whatever else commands influence, respect, or esteem."

Authority in this sense plays no small part in the world of science. Of the closeness of parallelism existing in this respect between science and religion, a striking example is given by Dr. Hill, once president of Harvard. He says: "I was recently reading to a friend the report of a scene in our National Academy of Sciences. The Superintendent of the Coast Survey had poured out with great earnestness a mathematical discovery of his own, which he deemed of the very highest importance; but it was necessarily clothed in language perfectly unintelligible to the great majority of his hearers. When he had closed, and all were sitting in silent bewilderment, the great zoölogist arose, and said in substance, 'I have not understood one word of this communication; but I have heretofore had such ample reason to believe in the speaker's clearness and soundness of thought that I accept what he has now said as undoubtedly true, and undoubtedly to be of great practical value.' When I had read this anecdote to my friend," continues Dr. Hill, "he exclaimed, 'That is precisely my feeling toward Jesus Christ.'"<sup>1</sup> And, in proportion as our estimate of Jesus Christ rises, will our confidence in what he says, because he says it, also rise. It is possible, then, for authority, as used in reference to religion, to mean some-

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Hill, *Postulates of Revelation and Ethics*, pp. 224, 225.

thing else than arbitrary dictation; it is possible for it to mean, and as used in such discussions authority often does mean, anything beyond a man's own nature and experience which influences or should influence his intellectual or spiritual attitude toward God,<sup>1</sup> such confidence in another as leads us to accept his teachings, not because his power demands belief, but because the fact that he makes an assertion guarantees its truth.

Authority in this sense has played a part in Christianity from the beginning. Not only was the Old Testament prophet and lawgiver manifestly conscious that his words and views should influence and, in short, control his hearers, but New Testament apostle and seer were, if anything, still more fixed in this conviction and more positive in the expression of it, while the teaching of Jesus impresses most of all with its consciousness of authority. He does not argue but assert; he does not demonstrate, he commands. His "I say unto you," ringing so unmistakably in the Sermon on the Mount, is in reality no less dominant throughout all his teaching. "He taught them as having authority."<sup>2</sup>

But it is certain that the part of authority in Christianity has sometimes been exaggerated, and that its seat has been misplaced. So we may well inquire next, whether there now remains a proper place for it in our religion. If anything exists beyond a man's own nature and experience which should influence his attitude toward God, that may properly be styled authority. Certainly, without the most careful investigation, we dare not say that any place in religion for authority is impossible, that in no common consent of investigators, in no church or creed, in no sage or

<sup>1</sup> Compare V. H. Stanton, *Place of Authority in Matters of Religious Belief*, p. 12, and J. F. Clarke, *Orthodoxy: its Truths and its Errors*, p. 115.

<sup>2</sup> Compare R. A. Armstrong, *God and the Soul*, p. 145.

seer, in no prophet or apostle, in no Word of God, verbal or incarnate, in short in no body and no thing, nowhere outside ourselves, can there reside any element of "intellectual or moral superiority" to ourselves which may rightfully affect our religious convictions and actions.

In form at least, Martineau, to be sure, would refuse such influence to all outside the experience and thought of the man himself, "inasmuch as," in his own words, "second-hand belief, assented to at the dictation of an initiated expert, without personal response of thought and reverence in myself, has no more tincture of religion in it than any other lesson learned by rote."<sup>1</sup> But we should carefully note, before assenting to this view, just what it is which he tacitly regards as the only conceivable notion of authority, and here rejects. It is needless to assert that "second-hand belief . . . without response of thought and reverence in myself" has no religious value. This we will accept, but we thus make no progress at all in reference to authority in the aspect in which we have come now to regard it. True authority in religion secures belief and evokes reverence, and, touching authority in its proper sense, all may well heed and echo the warning of Hill, from whom I have already quoted, like Martineau an eminent Unitarian, a man as eminent in the scientific as in the religious world, who said, "We run the risk of great folly and absurdity, if we are . . . led to deny all authority in matters of religion. It is always reasonable to defer to the opinion of those best qualified to judge."<sup>2</sup>

This suggests, further, that there is no necessary antithesis between authority and reason. To be sure this is a constant assumption of those who contend against authority in religion. Their view is thus summed up by Balfour: "Reason, according to this view, is a kind of Or-

<sup>1</sup> James Martineau, Preface to *The Seat of Authority in Religion*, p. vi.

<sup>2</sup> *Postulates*, p. 225.

muzd doing constant battle against the Ahriman of tradition and authority."<sup>1</sup> This is no exaggeration. For example, in a late number of the *Revue Chrétienne* we read: "As a religion of authority Christianity has finished its course. . . . The authority which sets limits to the intellect, and demands faith without reasons for faith, is on the decline, and is carrying down in its fall the religions which were fed on its substance."<sup>2</sup> But when authority is understood as it should be, as signifying whatever from outside ourselves should influence our attitude, we shall see that the forced antithesis between authority and reason is either a fallacy or a trick. The distinction is not between believing with reasons and believing without reasons, but between resting belief only on our personal experience and thought and, on the other hand, including within its foundation the thought and experience of others as well. Authority is not opposed to reason in its true sense: on the contrary, authority is reason: "It is always reasonable to defer to the opinion of those best qualified to judge." That which is really set in opposition to authority, and which refuses to defer to it, is not reason, but rather that state of mind which in egotistic self-sufficiency limits the field of evidence to what it finds in itself, and shuts every sense to all that comes from beyond itself. Such a method would block all scientific progress, would wreck philosophy, would annihilate history. Can it be less harmful in the sphere of religion? Both intellectually and morally, society rests upon authority. We are heirs of all the ages only as the bequest comes through rightful deference to rightful authority: only as we accept some influence from beyond ourselves. Can religion dare to be an exception?

Just as little as to reason, is authority opposed to conscience, as is implied by Martineau, and might to some be

<sup>1</sup> Foundations of Belief, p. 201.

<sup>2</sup>From an article by Paul Chapuis, April, 1897, pp. 225, 226.

suggested on a rapid first reading of the essay by Phillips Brooks on "Authority and Conscience." Though not always definitely, what this essay really opposes is, such authority as consists merely in ecclesiastical dictation, and it is a protest against unthinking and unmoral subservience to the church of the past as a historical organization. Indeed no one has insisted on the place of authority more positively than Bishop Brooks in this very essay. He says: "In general the subjects of authority are three—facts, dogmas, and rites. Facts *must* be taken on authority. . . . Authority is the ship in which the dogma sails. . . . It is needless to ask whether the soul ought to keep them [ceremonies] solely on the authority of Christ's command, even with no perception of their utility."<sup>1</sup> He thus in reality asserts the place of authority, and only pleads, so far as the present course of thought is concerned, that the supreme imperative lies in the aroused conscience, so that all will agree with him that there need be no antithesis between authority and conscience, that the true relation may be, must be, authority *and* conscience, as well as authority *and* reason, all in their right estate inseparable forever.

Finding, then, that authority in religion is a possibility, that there is room and place for it, the next inquiry must be, Has this place been filled? Is there any such authority? What is actually authoritative, what the ultimate standard of authority in religion?

First, we must consider the claims which have been made that the results of a man's own thinking should be regarded as a finality. These conclusions are often elevated into a standard under the name reason, and there underlies this use of the name (whether consciously or not need not at present be inquired) the fallacious suggestion that what is not derived from or at any time verifiable by the reasoning powers of the individual is contrary to sound

<sup>1</sup> Phillips Brooks, *Essays and Addresses*, pp. 113-115.

reason; in short, that it is unreasonable to accept what one's own reasoning cannot directly certify. Now of course, so far as the present discussion is concerned, rigid adherence to our definition would immediately exclude a man's own powers and their results as standard, seat, or source of authority, for authority has been defined, for the present discussion, as something outside the man himself. And again there might be advanced, against the conclusiveness of any man's intellectual conclusions, such considerations as are suggested in Pascal's trenchant sentences relating to the uncertainty which unavoidably attends man's reasoning processes. "It does not need the report of a cannon to disturb his thoughts: the creaking of a vane or pulley is quite enough. Do not wonder that he reasons ill just now; a fly is buzzing in his ear; it is enough to make him incapable of sound judgment." "Man is but a being filled with error. . . . Nothing shows him the truth: everything deceives him."<sup>1</sup>

Putting aside failure to conform to the definition of authority already accepted, and waiving all discussion of the fallibility of human powers, it is enough to note that the mind of man necessarily lacks the range and scope which are indispensable to furnish a complete and sure basis of religion. Religion deals with the relations of man and God. These relations are to no small extent mutual, and what man should be depends upon what God is and demands. Now while nature with voiceless eloquence tells of power and divinity, and while experiment may instruct and verify, as the soul learns of God by actually establishing relations with him, yet compare and sum up all philosophy and religion which is independent of Scripture, and how little is the sum of it all! We have the mighty imperative of "ought," we have the conviction of God's existence and the assurance of his perfection, we have the

<sup>1</sup> Blaise Pascal, *Thoughts* (Wight's translation), pp. 185, 192.

sense of our sinfulness and yet an inextinguishable hope of pardon; but how incomplete the basis thus furnished for theology or religion! And if we pass this range of the simplest principles of religious truth, what else is supplied with certainty by the action of our own faculties? For example, that God is love would be held by many to be not more the teaching of the Bible than the certain conviction independently supplied as a result of our own mental processes. But Aristotle taught that God is pure intelligence,<sup>1</sup> and a Japanese teacher declared, in the hearing of a missionary, that it is absurd to think of God as love, that he is reason. Now, on the basis of what we can individually think out for ourselves, how can we positively assert the one or dispute the other view? However confident in our own views or emphatic in the statement of them, how can we convince others, how can we be really certain for ourselves, unless there is an objective standard by which to verify, correct, or confirm our individual conceptions? The same need in another sphere, art, has lately been asserted by the French critic, Brunetière, who declares that we ought to go beyond our own sense of pleasure or displeasure, and inquire whether we are correct in our sentiments, that is, "whether the apparent harmony which delights us springs from agreement with our own imperfect taste, or from inherent and eternal harmonies to which our souls ought to vibrate and respond." No less in religion than in art is it necessary to inquire whether our conclusions are due to the imperfection of our own powers and methods, or to eternal verities which our souls ought to accept, and no more in religion than in art can this question be answered without recourse to an objective standard of authority.

Such a standard and source has been thought by some to be furnished by the activity of the Holy Spirit in the

<sup>1</sup> Compare Weber, *History of Philosophy*, p. 117.

mind and soul. There have been some who held to an unceasing, universal self-revelation of God to all men everywhere as they would receive it, while others, as the Friends, have held that this revelation of truth and duty comes by the indwelling Spirit only or chiefly to believers. When we come to scrutinize the results of these so-called revelations, we notice at once that in amount they are at most but slight. As we have noticed that the common stock of religious truth possessed by all mankind is but small, so we find that the alleged supplement to scriptural truth is not claimed even by mystics themselves as large in amount. Nor do these newer revelations, if they are to be so styled, come to the soul of the man himself with the certitude of the biblical revelations. Only exceptionally does the man of God of to-day utter the prophetic "Thus saith the Lord" as the prophet of old used to utter it of truth then new to the whole world. And, finally, it is a most significant fact, that other men are not impressed by the truth which it may be held that the Spirit is now newly giving. The church bows to the Bible, but to its continuations, supplements, and corrections not in the least. In value of results, certitude, power to impress, all modern revelation fails. It may be granted that there is a witness of the Spirit which is given to the individual in relation to truth, but it is not of the nature of revelation. The phrase of Professor F. H. Foster has not been bettered: "The testimony of the Spirit is the work of the Spirit: the work of the Spirit is the experience of the Christian."<sup>1</sup> But while the experience of the Christian to him is new, and to him illuminates much that has been dark and confirms much that has been doubtful, it can scarcely be said that to others it brings new truth or even confirms old truth. The Christian experience of this century, varied, rich, and fruitful as it has been, has yet added nothing to

<sup>1</sup> *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 1895, pp. 78, 79.



what was long ago given to the church and the world in the thoughts and experiences of David and Isaiah, Paul and John, not to add the Divine Man.

But granted that God has not made the experience of the individual believer a standard of authority, it has still been held that authority may and does reside in the collective thought and feeling of all believers, or at any rate of most believers. Some declare the final standard to be the "Christian consciousness." The name, to be sure, is awkward and misleading at first sight, for consciousness must, properly speaking, be always individual; but its intended signification is the harmonious beliefs of all Christians, or at least of so many that those lacking become only exceptions to the general rule. Now while, from a purely naturalistic standpoint, it may not seem particularly significant that throughout the ages the purest, wisest, loftiest souls of Christendom are in essential and substantial agreement, yet to him who believes that God through his Spirit unceasingly guides those who are his own there cannot fail to be a certain impressiveness and value in this agreement. To use another clear statement from the pen of Dr. Hill, "From whatever source it come, a holy and religious character is presumptive evidence of a correct knowledge of religious truths; and, therefore, the presumption is always in favor of those main doctrines of monotheism and piety which have been held with unwavering conviction by the saints of all ages and of all churches."<sup>1</sup>

But in considering the question as to whether the agreement of Christians in belief can be a seat or source of authority, it must be remembered, first, that it is not in itself a source of knowledge. It does not discover truth, at most it only confirms it. It has taken up the truths given by revelation, and has strengthened our hold upon them, because of the harmony between the word which was writ-

<sup>1</sup> Postulates, p. 226.

ten and the thoughts of those who have been led in their thinking by the Spirit of God. There has been in the minds of Christians not only a firmer grasp, but a steadily widening and enlarging appreciation, of the truths already given in ancient revelation. As of nature, so of revelation, "The thoughts of men are widened with the process of the suns." But on the other hand there is not one truth of fact or duty now known which was first made known by the so-called "Christian consciousness," as distinguished from revelation and from the common activity of men's minds.

Further, in estimating the work and value of the Christian consciousness, it is all-important to beware of what, for lack of a better name, might be styled provincialism. It is easy to confuse the view of an age, a sect, a party, a school, a mere eddy, with the view of the church as a whole, the stream which is ever broadening as it flows toward the ocean of infinite truth. Not what is loudest, not what is nearest, not what is likeliest to our own thinking, is, because of its loudness, nearness, likeness, to be accepted as the verdict of Christian consciousness, but rather what is most general, most permanent, most in accord with the old canon of Vincentius when that is taken in its best sense, "what has been ever and everywhere accepted by all."

Thus to recognize the true verdict of the "mind of the Lord" as that mind is possessed by Christians in general, is not easy. Hence men have tried to centralize and simplify this verdict, at the same time confirming its authority. We all know how tremendous and how widely successful was the attempt to enthrone as authority, nominally subordinate to the Scriptures, but practically supreme and ultimate, the church as an organized body, the attempt culminating in our generation in the decree by the Vatican Council of the infallibility of the Pope. But however set

forth, centralized in creed, in council, or in Pope, the contest of Protestantism has been so pronounced, clear, and full, that for present purposes there is no need even to recapitulate its substance. Whatever authority may belong to the common thought of Christians, this authority cannot be recognized in the Church of Rome and the Papacy.

Having thus considered in turn the authority which may reside in the results of human thought, in the influence of God on soul and on souls, and in the church as an organized body, it remains only to inquire as to the authority of Scripture. If authority, clear, full, decisive, final, does not reside in Scripture, the sphere of authority in religion has not yet at least been filled. We have found that authority in religion is no absurdity or impossibility. We have repeatedly been brought to recognize its usefulness and importance. Without it there must remain much uncertainty in the mind of the individual. Without it disagreement even on fundamental matters cannot fail to reign in the church and to continue to reign. Yet if it is not to be found in Scripture, it is nowhere.

In the Bible we have writings which, however varied in time and place and occasion of writing, yet in their historical transmission have come to be a unit, and this unit has been regarded as authoritative. When from men's thoughts about Scripture, we turn to itself, we find, here and there at least, the distinct claim that alongside the presupposed human element there is also a divine element, that the words of men were the Word of God as well. This claim we hear from the lips of ancient prophets, we read it from the pen of later apostles, above all it comes to us from Him who claimed to be the truth as well as to see it and know it and speak it. Now the fact of claim is of course alone insufficient to certify to the existence of the divine element. But the claim does not stand unsupported and unverified. It is reënforced and guaranteed by va-

ried qualities which so conform to it, require it, and manifest it, as to make the recognition of its existence most reasonable, and, indeed, alone reasonable.

For example, there is a unity to Scripture as a whole. Just as surely as through the ages one increasing purpose runs, so a single dominating purpose is present in all the Scriptures and binds their many parts into indissoluble unity. What else than a divine control can have bent to a single end the songs and sagas, if they be so regarded, of the ancient Hebrews, together with the oratory and biography, history and letters and visions of many later ages? Consciously or unconsciously, all has the cross for its center and pivot.

"All the light of sacred story  
Gathers round its head sublime!"

With this unity of theme is combined harmony of treatment. The cross might be the center, and yet harmony might not result. The cross is the center of modern theories of the atonement, and still harmony does not result. At first glance this harmony may not readily be perceived. Standing close to the orchestra, we may notice the varied motions of the musicians and the unlike tones of their instruments, rather than the single impression of the one idea which dominates the symphony which they render. But while of course immensely longer study is needed to trace the harmony which exists in Scripture than to catch the dominant thought of a musical composition, yet study, prolonged, patient, sympathetic, will find the harmony, will at last follow through all the books the symphony of salvation, the song of Moses and the Lamb.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Compare Origen, *Comm. on Matthew*, Bk. ii., in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Am. ed., vol. ix. p. 413. Also John Arrowsmith, *Chain of Principles*, pp. 104-106, quoted in *Pres. and Ref. Rev.*, 1893, p. 628. "As if one drew water out of a deep well with vessels of different metal, one of brass, another of tin, a third of earth, the water may seem at first to be of a different color; but when the vessels are brought near the eye, this

Even more conspicuously manifest in Scripture is its purity. Beyond and above every other book ever penned, the Bible condemns sin and exalts rightness, goodness, holiness. As nowhere else, shines the light of Him who is light and in whom is no darkness at all: as nowhere else, we that read are convinced, convicted, attracted, for as nowhere else this purity is power.<sup>1</sup> Let us listen on this point to two men most unlike. Let Gladstone speak: "The Bible is stamped with specialty of origin, and an immeasurable distance separates it from all competitors." Let Heine speak: "He who has lost his God, can find him again in this book; and he who has never known him, is here struck by the breath of the Divine Word."<sup>2</sup>

The unity, harmony, and purity which we find in Scripture is explicable only on the ground of a divine element. Now the presence of a divine element in Scripture is a basis for authority as infallibly sure as it is necessary. If our thoughts and acts are properly influenced by mental and moral superiority wherever we find them, then by the revelation of God, they should be absolutely controlled, for

diversity of color vanisheth, and the waters tasted of have the same relish. So here, the different style of the historiographers from prophets, of the prophets from evangelists, of the evangelists from apostles, may make the truths of Scripture seem of different complexions, till one look narrowly into them and taste them advisedly, then will the identity both of color and relish manifest itself."

<sup>1</sup> Compare George Gillespie, quoted in *Pres. and Ref. Rev.*, 1893, p. 627. "The Scripture is known to be indeed the word of God . . . by certain distinguishing characteristics which do infallibly prove it to be the word of God, such as the heavenliness of the matter; the majesty of the style; the irresistible power over the conscience; the general scope to abase man and to exalt God; nothing driven at but God's glory and man's salvation; the extraordinary holiness of the penmen of the Holy Ghost," etc.

<sup>2</sup> Both quoted by Dean Farrar, in *The Bible: its Meaning and its Supremacy*. Compare Calvin, *Institutes*, Book i. chap. viii. sect. 1.

his mental and moral superiority are incomparable. If it is always reasonable to defer to the opinion of those best qualified to judge in the matter concerned, it is most reasonable for man in his limitations to bow humbly before the Infinite and Supreme One. Wherever and whenever we meet the Divine, it must be absolutely authoritative. When God speaks, man can only obey.

It appears, then, that the divine element in the Scriptures justifies, nay, requires, their authority, and that their authority rests on this divine element. Accordingly, we may not limit our view to the theory which Fairbairn commends, when he says of the Scriptures, "The truth was not true because they contained it; they were true because of the truth they contained."<sup>1</sup> Now, so far as this is more than a truism, it is misleading, and unfair to the very doctrine of the Reformation which he here professes to state. There is no question, whether presence in the Scriptures makes a statement true, for no man ever taught or thought that it made the untrue true. The teaching of the Reformation was not that what is in the Scriptures is thereby made to be true, but that it was thereby known to be true, so that it is authoritative and to be accepted, and that this authority does not depend simply or primarily upon our recognition of the truth of the teachings contained in Scripture, for then an unverifiable statement would have no claim upon us. Authority in religion is that which, outside our own experience and thought, should influence our attitude to God. This quality Scripture has, not merely because it is verifiably true, but still more because its origin is not of men, even of the wisest, purest, best, but of God himself. The truth of a statement depends upon its own nature; its authority depends upon its origin. The higher its origin, the greater its authority. What comes from God, because it comes from

<sup>1</sup> A. M. Fairbairn, *The Place of Christ in Modern Theology*, p. 161.

him, is, and remains forever, absolute, supreme, and final in its authority.

Perhaps it may be well to note that, for the present discussion, several attributes which have been ascribed to Scripture (whether rightly or wrongly matters not) are left entirely out of account. So far as canonicity is a historical attribute, and relates to the insertion of a writing in the list of recognized Scriptures, it has nothing to do with the present thought; so far as canonicity means being a standard or rule, that is neither more nor less than authority. If authenticity is understood to mean genuineness, it lies one side of this discussion; if it is taken as synonymous with authority, the use of this word adds nothing. If inspiration is defined, as sometimes, as that influence of God which makes the Scriptures authoritative, its use would be in this discussion a begging of the question; if it is used to designate either a special form of divine influence on human spirits, or "touched in a high degree with the best spiritual influences of the time," its use introduces in the one case a question of method, interesting and profitable in itself, but here irrelevant, or in the other a perversion, no less dangerous if honest, of a word with a rightful because historic signification. So far as inerrancy or freedom from actual error, and infallibility or freedom from the possibility of error, are demonstrated characteristics of Scripture, they comport well enough with its authority; but we have no right on the one hand to infer infallibility or inerrancy in all points, scientific, historical, rhetorical, grammatical, as a necessary consequence of its authority, nor, on the other, to deny religious authority to the Bible because of scientific, historical, rhetorical, grammatical errors, supposed or known, inasmuch as it is not in the sphere of grammar, rhetoric, history, or science that it is an authority. Its authority is in the sphere of morals and religion, and its authority in this sphere is to be ac-

cepted not on the ground that its every statement has been or can be verified by us, or by any one to-day, but on the ground that it is the word of God, because, as the Westminster Confession states it, "the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is to give glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the word of God."

Such objections to this conclusion as are based upon a theory of the nature of God which would forbid him to give a revelation which was not equally accessible to all men, or on a theory of his method of working in the world which would find any special revelation intolerably inconsistent, need no prolonged discussion. If the Scriptures can evidence themselves as the word of God, then *a priori* considerations must here, as everywhere, make way for facts; if they cannot thus evidence themselves, these considerations are needless.

It is perhaps important, however, to notice the objection which has been raised against the authority of the Scriptures, on the alleged ground that they are inconsistent with reason. But the old, subtle fallacy is here lurking in the use of the word "reason." To make this argument really valid, it would be necessary to show that the Scriptures teach what is logically absurd, and this has never been done. What is, in fact, intended by the phrase, is, that the Scriptures teach what men had never thought out for themselves, which is also, in some cases at least, unverifiable, and perhaps to some minds, apart from Scripture, improbable. But in this fact lies no inconsistency with reason, only a correcting and supplementing of the results of reasoning, and this, which is what we should expect of



a divine revelation, is no real objection to the authority of Scripture, but, rather, a confirmation of it.<sup>1</sup>

The religious authority of Scripture is further attacked on the ground of its alleged inconsistency with the present results of scientific investigation. The science of our day is set over against Scripture, and the alleged inconsistency is considered fatal to the authority of the latter. But the examples cited to demonstrate this inconsistency belong to one or the other of two classes. Either they belong to the domain of nature and history, in which case they do not conflict with the authority of Scripture, for this authority is, as has already been noted, not scientific or historical, but moral and religious: or these difficulties belong in the realm of the unverifiable, in which case they lie outside the domain of science. For example, objection has sometimes been raised on supposedly scientific grounds to the Bible teaching as to the relation between death and human sin, and as to the conditions obtaining in the future life, but these are matters which, by their very nature, are such as to lie outside the realm of science; and, as science can have no knowledge, and therefore can furnish no results regarding them, there can be no possible inconsistency on these points between science and Scripture.

<sup>1</sup> Compare George T. Ladd, *Doctrine of Sacred Scripture*, p. 532: "Rationalism needs, then, perpetually to be reminded of its own irrationality. When it sets reason up as an independent critic and judge of all revelation, it divides reason against itself. The very reason which rationalism would thus exalt has been informed and developed by a process of divine self-revelation. In its own development it must always, from the very nature of the case, feel its dependence upon the objective and definite forms of truth which it has had made known to it in the past course of its own development. It goes safely when it goes humbly, leaning on the divine hand which has helped it hitherto. And when it walks arrogantly, or runs heedlessly, it uses the strength derived from the very God whom it forgets or abjures. Only when one man's reason can assume to do, at every moment of his rational existence, the entire work which God has done in the whole race during its past history, can that man be safe in casting off the recorded and organic reason of the past."

Again, it has been objected to the claim of authority for the Bible, that "the claim itself can only be established, if at all, by the use of those very faculties which this Divine Revelation is to supersede. If you cannot trust our reasoning powers to begin with, then neither can you trust them to establish this prodigious claim for the Christian Scriptures."<sup>1</sup> But it needs little consideration to see the unfairness of this statement. Without dwelling on the fact that the Scriptures, if accepted as authoritative, do not supersede our powers as untrustworthy, but furnish them matter for their use, it should be said that it is by no means unlikely that our powers may be capable of recognizing a trustworthy authority, while incapable of ascertaining all that may be communicated by that authority. The traveler in the Alps does not suppose that he is discrediting his own intellectual powers when he engages a guide, but, frankly recognizing that he himself lacks the knowledge of mountain craft and local conditions indispensable if he were alone to reach the summit, past precipice, glacier, and crevasse, he seeks out one who, as he is convinced by his testimonials, is a trustworthy guide, who will be, in a word, an authority for the ascent. To know the pathless mountain is one thing; to choose a guide is quite another. So, personally to experience, intuitively to perceive, or unerringly to infer, all needed truth, is, for the individual man, simply impracticable; to accept the Scriptures as authority, may be, nay, is, the sanest and supremest act of reason.

Again, an antithesis is sometimes forced between the authority of the Bible and the authority of Christ. But this is needless and harmful. It was Jesus himself who said of the Old Testament, "The Scripture cannot be broken"; and where shall we go for Christ's words of eternal life but to the New Testament? Were the two in demonstrated

<sup>1</sup> R. A. Armstrong, *God and the Soul*, p. 167.

opposition, we might be compelled to choose; but, as the case stands, when the unfair question is raised, "Which?" the only proper answer is, "Both." To find Christ as an authority we must go to the Bible, and the authority of Christ certifies the authority of the Bible.

Still another objection has been raised,—the only one, indeed, which Martineau develops,<sup>1</sup>—namely, that the authors of the Bible are in great part unknown. But even if we were constrained to accept his views as to the origin of the books of the Bible, this would not in the least affect the authority of Scripture; for this depends not on the human element, but on the divine, and consequently it might well enough happen that, as is now the case with some, many books belonged to authors not now known. It is not because any man wrote any book of the Bible that we assert its authority. The Bible is authoritative, because in it God recognizably speaks.

The last objection which demands attention is, that the speakers and writers of the Bible do not rest their claim and demand for attention and obedience solely on the basis of their authority, whence it has been strangely enough questioned whether they do indeed possess authority. Now it may freely be granted that they do frequently argue and entreat as well as declare and command. But this implies no doubt on their part of their authority. It only shows a constant purpose to use all means to save some, to try every method to secure right belief and behavior. In addition to assertion and demand, prophets, apostles, the Divine Man himself, show the sweet reasonableness and eternal rightfulness of what they assert and demand, and, by so doing, they no more rob their doctrine of its divine authority by this appeal to reason than by their no less frequent appeals to gratitude and fear and love and hope.

The conviction of the divine authority of the Bible re-

<sup>1</sup> *The Seat of Authority in Religion*, pp. 181-285.

ceives manifold confirmation. For instance, since its moral and spiritual teaching reached with the apostles its final development, this teaching has been nowhere set aside. During this time the tone of the world's literature has been transformed: the conceptions of sin and of righteousness which have come to be prevalent in modern times are elevated out of reach of those anciently prevalent, but they do not overtop the ancient Scriptures, and the Scripture ideal of morality and the Scripture precepts for its practice are nowhere found erroneous or unworthy. Again, the religious doctrines of the Bible are not proved erroneous. Of course theology as a systematic science is almost entirely absent from its pages; but, unlike its natural science, which was no part of the divine revelation which it records but only that of its time, its assertions as to spiritual truth were not of that time, but for all time. Age after age has, in some part at least, ignored them; age after age has, in part at least, denied them; but later ages have carefully rescued the neglected, rejected truths, and no part of the spiritual content of Scripture has been superseded. Perhaps, on a narrow and unfair view of revelation, which overlooked its gradual development, and that the ancient law was not filled full to its original purpose till Jesus came, error might be claimed, but it must be recognized that what he taught with his own lips and through his Spirit-guided apostles has found no loosing, and has needed no completion.<sup>1</sup>

For, while, as has just been said, no part of the religious content of Scripture has been set aside, so nothing has been added to it. This is not because the attempt has not been made. The Roman Catholic Church, in particular, has in fact, if not in purpose, greatly extended the teaching of Scripture. So, from age to age, philosopher, theologian and reformer, dogmatist, rationalist and mystic, have tried

<sup>1</sup> Compare G. J. Romanes, *Thoughts on Religion*, pp. 157, 158.

over and over again the same experiment; but, little by little, the unscriptural accretions fall away again, so that to-day, whatever may be true of parties, schools, and sects, nowhere does the creed of the church as a whole outmeasure the extent of Scripture. That theology has been a progressive science need not be disputed, but its progress consists not in the discovery of new facts and truths outside of the Bible, but in the clearer recognition and better statement of what is found within the Bible. Christian thought has greatly flourished in the ages, but all its seeds are in the Scriptures.

Thus the Scriptures demonstrate their sufficiency and consequent finality. As they have found no correction or supplement, so they need none. Not that all theological problems are solved, not that all religious questionings are set at rest, not that a large range does not remain for the investigations of reason as well as for the imperative of conscience; but, beyond the revelation recorded in Scripture, nothing further in morals or religion is necessary for salvation or indeed possible, for, in the clear phrase of Dr. Abbott, "Beyond the revelation, in his Anointed One, of a God of perfect love abiding in perfect truth and purity, there is nothing to be revealed concerning him."<sup>1</sup>

Again, the harmony which exists between Christian experience and the Bible is to the believer a marvelous confirmation of its divinity and consequent authority. This proof is thus stated by Herrmann: "A man learns how to see this glory of the sacred Scripture when there has begun in him the same life whose rise and whose perfection are there so incomparably described. . . . Before that, the thought that he is to treat the Bible otherwise than as he treats all other literature is to him intolerable, or, at least, utterly strange. Afterward he looks upon it as an actual miracle in history standing there before his eyes, that, as

<sup>1</sup> Lyman Abbott, *The Theology of an Evolutionist*, p. 66.

he opens the Scriptures, he finds there a new world, a new home for the new personal life that has begun in himself."<sup>1</sup> The conviction that the Scriptures are from God, because they correspond so wonderfully to results of divine activity in the soul, a conviction doubtless wrought and confirmed by the Holy Spirit himself, is of course incommunicable; but its general existence, proved by the testimony of believers inexplicable if untrue, is no weak argument for the divine origin, and hence for the authority, of the Bible, while to the soul which shares this conviction it is conclusive beyond argumentation.

It is a development of this conviction wrought in the soul of the individual believer, that the belief in the authority of the Scriptures, absolute, sufficient, final, has always been firmly held by the church in all ages. To find the value of this agreement, it is not necessary to hold to the infallibility of the Christian consciousness in general, or of the creeds of the churches, even when accordant. To him who believes that the Holy Spirit is ever present to guide the church, it is incredible that on such a point the church universal should always have been in error, and the crowning confirmation of his own faith in the divine and hence absolute and final authority of Scripture will be the unanimity of the universal faith in the same truth. The prophecy of Augustine, "Faith will reel when the authority of Scripture wavers," must be far from fulfillment, for where is there a confession which touches the place of the Bible and does not make it authority? From the great mass of such credal statements which almost monotonously reiterate the thought of the single and supreme authority of Scripture, two may not unfitly be quoted in conclusion, which correspond very closely to the Congregational creed, quoted at the beginning of this discussion. The Walden-

<sup>1</sup> W. Herrmann, *The Communion of the Christian with God* (Eng. trans.), p., 36.

sians long ago declared "that we ought to receive the Holy Scripture (as we do), for divine and canonical, that is to say, for the constant rule of our faith and life," and the Free Christian Church in Italy now echoes the statement, saying, "God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost has manifested his will in Revelation, which is the Bible, the alone perfect and immutable rule of faith and conduct."