

ARTICLE IV.

THE PROGRESS OF TRUTH DEPENDENT ON CORRECT INTERPRETATION.¹

BY REV. SETH SWEETSER, D.D., WORCESTER, MASS.

THE excellent and learned Dr. Cudworth, in the opening of his celebrated sermon preached before the House of Commons in 1647, has these words: "The sons of Adam are now as busy as ever himself was about the tree of knowledge of good and evil, shaking the boughs of it, and scrambling for the fruit; whilst, I fear, many are too unmindful of the tree of life." Such an apprehension is as becoming in our day as it was two centuries ago. All knowledge, whether of God himself or of his works, of man, his nature and capacity, or his duty and destiny, should advance us in fitness and disposition to glorify and enjoy God. No higher aim can be proposed to us. The exercise of our faculties in the discovery and comprehension of laws and principles, both in material things and in the realm of mind, affords pleasure. But the pleasure of knowing, elevated as in one sense it is, is trivial and ephemeral when compared with the fruit of knowing, as knowledge feeds, fashions, and purifies the proper life and being of the soul. The divine goodness has made the bread we eat sweet to our taste, and the satisfaction of hunger a relish and delight. Yet is it unworthy of us to eat for mere pleasure; so it is with knowledge, which is to be got for the right use of it, rather than for the luxury of knowing.

The text has relation to a particular kind of knowledge, namely, that of God's truth; and it implies a particular end to be gained by it, namely, holiness: "Sanctify them

¹ John xvii. 17: "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth." A discourse delivered before the Convention of Congregational Ministers, in Boston, May, 1868.

through thy truth; thy word is truth." As God in his moral character is comprehensively described as holy, and as the summit of human attainments is likeness to God, it follows that understanding and applying God's truth is the way to secure the true and noblest end of our being.

Our chief duty lies with the word of God and the use of it. We admit without question, as implied in the text, that the word of God is truth. The designed effect involves the necessity of knowing it. The spirit of it, transfused through the soul, quickening it, and dwelling at the centre of activity and inciting us, is the power of spiritual growth and vigor; even as the heat of the sun, permeating the soil, seeking out the rootlets of a plant, and imparting warmth, is the quickening force in vegetable life. This, however, we should consider,—there is no magical power in the words of God—no charm in the letter to sway us and transform us, but only a moral power, acting through our understanding upon our will and affections. So then, having the words of God, we are to draw out from them the true idea of which they are the symbols, and thence derive life.

If, now, God's revealed truth is to operate as the sanctifying agency in the world, a true and thorough interpretation is pre-eminently necessary and altogether invaluable.

What are the contents of these divine oracles? What are the profound principles of life and conduct lying hidden in the word? What are the truths, eternal and unimpeachable, that are to be gathered by working this mine of infinite wisdom? The Christian world has had the *letter* for twenty centuries; but no unanimous answer is given to these fundamental questions. And yet the word of God is not changeful and contradictory, but one; not self-destructive, but self-consistent and self-sustaining. Its utterances are not double-tongued and deceptive, as were the responses of the oracle at Delphi. They are pure, like the virgin gold, and need only to be uncovered and looked at with a rectified vision to be seen in their incorruptible brilliancy. The discords and confusion attributed to the heavenly voices are

the refrains taken up by sincere but imperfect minds, or the broken echoes and reverberations resounding among antagonistic and impassioned clans. The notes of the *spirit*, could we only hear them with all their clearness, would thrill the reverent listener like the melody of the new song. The truth is an imperfect instrument, so long as it is imperfectly conceived and imperfectly applied. The channel that opens out its treasured blessings is interpretation.

We use this word for convenience; meaning by it the whole effort and result, both intellectual and moral, by which the truth becomes a spiritual power in forming a holy life. It is a very restricted view of the work of an interpreter to declare the meaning of words detected by the weary drudgery of lexicons and grammars. We can as little find the divine idea by minute analysis and fine-spun disquisitions on points and particles as we can catch the glory of the Apollo among the chips of the stone-worker. There is a service not to be spoken lightly of in the knowledge of language as the medium of thought; and the scholars who bring to the exposition of the word the skill attained by careful and generous study of the ancient dialects, aided by all helps of archaeology, history, topography, knowledge of manners, customs, theories, and speculations of past ages, are entitled to high honor, and their labor is as fruitful as it is indispensable. But there is a power in language to convey thought which is not representable through the definition of words. We may define with etymological and lexical accuracy the word "God." Do we thereby express its contents? The interpretation of that word is approached but very distantly when we comprehend, as best we may, the whole volume of his revelation, the vastness of his works, and the life of his Son. We substitute in our Bible, the word "God" for the Greek Θεός. If we have the power by the deepest research to understand even the whole that this word symbolized to the Greek mind, how very little does it inform us of God, as we conceive of the Infinite One whose name we thus write! To exhaust the contents of that one

word is beyond the capacity of our thought and all we have accumulated, and defies the inferences and conclusions of the widest career of learning. Even when the laboring mind shall be helped by a vision of the Holy One in his unclouded glory, there will still lie beyond our sight an unexplored infinite in the being of the Most High.

The truths of revelation come to us in language; and the words have definite significations. These significations must be fixed, if we are to derive information from the words. When Harvey discovered the circulation of the blood, he contributed to the science of the human body a fact of rare value. But when we consider man in the higher attributes of his moral and intellectual nature, his vast powers of thought, his profound responsibilities, his eternal being, with his capacity for doing, enjoying, and suffering, to what a point in our conception of this complex being does this central fact in physiology dwindle! The settlement of a rule of grammar, the determination of the use and force of the article, may shed light upon the exegesis of a scripture text. The mint, annise, and cummin are not to be despised, though there are weightier matters of the law. As judgment, mercy, and faith transcend these inferior acts of duty, so the idea, in its possibilities and applications, transcends the naked meaning of the words in which it sleeps, and from which it is summoned into life and action, to expand and stretch itself, as the infant rises from unconscious slumbers to grow to manhood and display the powers and faculties latent in him.

The precept "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" is one of the earliest of the written code. So far as the words are concerned, the phrase presents no difficulties. But who has as yet comprehended the length and breadth of moral obligation imbedded in it? Who has realized the wealth of human kindness stored up in this minute casket? The Jew had it of old; but he dwarfed it so that it could not extend out of Jewry. Christ sundered the fetters which restrained it, and gave it dominion broad as the earth. But

his disciples tethered it, so that its freedom was only the liberty of a sect or the narrow domain of a nation. England hemmed it in within the four seas; and the French across the narrow channel were not neighbors, and the swarthy Indians under a tropical sun were uncircumcised Gentiles.

In this fair land, consecrated to freedom and humanity, the breadth of its spirit has not been comprehended. The old divine at Newport, like Paul at Athens, brought certain strange things to our ears when he ventured a new interpretation. Its heavenly voice was unheeded in "the city of brotherly love," in this nineteenth century of grace, when a man could not in safety speak a word for his fellow-men, manacled and robbed; for the slave was no neighbor to his master, though born within sight of the family mansion. Five years of agony and blood have been working out an interpretation of the gem of truth set three thousand years ago in God's word to sparkle with divine light. The mists of passion and ignorance have hung heavily over it. The twilight has been long; but when the day dawns, and the sun rises, the glory of that revelation will blaze from land to land, from shore to shore, and the concentrated myriads of earth will be one neighborhood, rejoicing in the light of a common love as truly as in the light of the same sun in the firmament.

It is sometimes said to the disparagement of the Bible that it is old and out of date. An arrogant wisdom pronounces its truths obsolete, having no other value than historical data in the succession of opinions, or as curious fossils bearing the impression of effete ideas. These notions are related to a conception of progress in which the human mind by the force of its own capacity in observing and reasoning is credited with the power of originating and developing new truths. If, however, the Bible is, as we assume it to be, objective truth, a repository of truths fundamental and eternal, it can no more grow old and be outlearned than can the universe, in respect to which our knowledge seems to be so rapidly advancing. The laws of the material world, the forces of nature, and the system of

which we are a part, are now as they have been from the beginning. Science has created nothing. The earth revolved about the sun when all men believed, upon the testimony of their senses, that the earth stood still. The error was ignorance of fact. Copernicus and Galileo interpreted nature better than Ptolemy and the Romish conclave. The phenomena have not changed; we have learned to read them. And all that science can ever do to the end of time, if its powers of vision are multiplied a thousandfold in minuteness, and the spaces over which its observation extends are stretched a thousandfold, is to read the phenomena. The laws, the motions, the forces, the results, were imparted and fixed by the Infinite mind. Nature has nowhere changed. The sunbeam was the great painter before the prism was known. Its chemical power was inherent in it when chemistry had no existence. The utmost that can be said of man is that he laboriously turns over the leaves of this vast volume, and slowly spells out the words of wisdom and love engraven on its pages by the finger of God. Now, notwithstanding the freedom and the sense of superior intelligence indicated in the declarations concerning the Bible as a fossiliferous record, it stands to us as a field of investigation very much in the same attitude as the material world does. The truth is in it. The elements of spiritual life are there given by the Spirit of God. The principles of growth and elevation for the race and the individual are deposited in its words. All that will be necessary in all time for instruction and discipline, for purification, strength, and exaltation — all that man needs in his earthly trial, duty, and enjoyment, and in preparation for absolute happiness with God — lies enfolded in it, and is to be brought out from it. The progress of truth is not by the discovery of new truths, but by a knowledge of truths not comprehended. The Bible has suffered, just as the material world has, by false and partial interpretations. We are seeing through a glass darkly. The handling of scripture according to the forms of theology, and harmonizing it so as to conform it to the

necessities of a system, is putting a force upon truth which it cannot bear.

To work out a body of divinity by human ingenuity, and then invoke the spirit of truth from the Bible to inspire it, and set that up as Divine authority, is doing what Lord Bacon charges upon the scholastic divinity — “reducing divinity to an art.” Whereas, divine knowledge is drawing out from a divine fountain the living waters, as they are gathered there for use and information. In making systems there is ever danger of forcing the divine idea to advance a human plan; and we can call it nothing less than a felony to coerce truth to subserve a purpose for which the God of truth never designed it. But this is the way in which the light of truth has been hindered in its shining. Devout and holy, but imperfect men, have shaped their doctrines, framed their systems, and reduced the word of God to a symmetrical form for enunciation and defence. And then the Bible has been compelled to do service in vindication, not of truth in its simplicity, but of truth complicated with errors of human judgment and the misapprehensions of human short-sightedness. This method of dealing with truth has resulted in giving more of a complexion of changeableness to religious opinion than of progress. But this is not a fault to be charged upon the scriptures. The Bible is not responsible for false interpretations, or for incongruous systems built up out of its pages. The word of God is not chargeable with the errors of Calvinism, Arminianism, or Socinianism, any more than the solar system, in its simple balance and harmony under one all-pervading law, is responsible for the ingenious, but baseless theory of cycles and epicycles. It is perhaps hardly presumptuous to say that the phrase, “The just shall live by faith,” was as little comprehensible by the Hebrew, in the midst of his outward ordinances and an earthly temple, as the celestial mechanics of La Place would have been to the Persians, who watched the courses of the stars amid the ravishing glories of an oriental sky.

That phrase, so pregnant with meaning and with mercy, was at the beginning, as it were, a nebular mist, in the eye of the generation to whom it was at first declared. The new dispensation resolved it, when it was seen under the power of the death of Christ, illuminating the old types. It stood out with more impressive distinctness when Paul applied to it the divine logic, with which God's Spirit filled his words. It gained clearness and brilliancy when Luther felt its power with a new freshness, as his soul came into liberty from the heavy burden of works and penances. The interpretation has been going on, not by force of study, not by acuteness of perception, not by the penetration of the human intellect, and the keenness of dialectics, but under the tuition of the Great Teacher, who in the conspiring work of his providence and his grace, is ever unfolding the treasures of his love, to edify and form the body of Christ, for the glory of the final manifestation. But even now, after the growth of centuries, this truth is not so cleared of the obscurities hung around it by the narrow conceptions of those who have held it, as to present to all minds one and the same bright beam from the loving heart of God. Throughout Roman and Greek Christendom it is still burdened with the rubbish of inventions and the bribes of self-righteousness. At the other extreme it is reduced to a shadow by the annulling assertion of the worth of meritorious goodness. And even where humble pity is seeking with patient endeavor to find the will of God, there is not only among various divisions of believers a conflict, but individual disciples are vibrating, in painful unrest, between the firm foundations laid for hope in the mercy of God and the unsatisfying consciousness of their own obedience. If now the great scheme of God's redemption is what it is foreshadowed to be upon the very face of scripture, it is no presumption to say, that much of the broad and solid substructure of truth upon which is to be reared the eternal repose of immortal souls has not as yet been laid bare to our eyes. It is all there, and will yet be seen, we may devoutly believe, when the trained

vision shall know how to divine the whole spirit of the record in the symbols that preserve it. But time is necessary. The underlying rocks, with their garnered deposits, were unknown testimony to the history of the globe for ages. Our reading the characters is not a creation of facts, but an extension of vision. The crust has been broken, and new wonders brought to light. It is possible that some excited minds, intoxicated with the novelty, are quite exultant in having unravelled the whole history of creation. More time and patient research will widen the boundaries of knowledge, and among other things expose the folly of hasty conclusions, of which geology is peculiarly prone to be guilty; as was the case with Werner, one of the early founders of the science, who partially investigated a province, and then inferred the structure of a world. The volume of nature and the volume of inspiration are both sealed with the signet, and marked with the character of One, almighty and all-wise. We shall not master either record in a life-time. And as one record is the history of a finite, perishing, material system, and the other the principles and institutes of an order of beings intellectual and immortal, we are to presume that the depths of this divine revelation are more unfathomable than the depths of the universe of matter.

We are thus led to affirm the truth, that the interpretation of the word of God presents to us a field as boundless as our conceptions can be. It embraces the whole study of the infinite, as the Infinite One has unveiled himself to be looked upon and known in the relations he holds to us, and in his purposes in regard to our destiny. If we knew all the universe—the subtilist attractions, the most comprehensive laws, the minute pulsation of infusorial life, and the vast forces swaying the visible and invisible immensity of celestial systems—we should know less than God. And if all these systems have a limit and a termination, even though that limit be fixed at myriads of ages hence, it is inferior to the race of immortal beings, whom God by the revelation of himself and his purposes is training for immortal glory.

Our powers of investigation may be exhausted; but the theme cannot be.

We must confess to some degree of wonder, that men accustomed to serious thought and having exercised on great subjects the faculty of reason are so easily persuaded to exalt the science of things above the science of being; and to be so much more satisfied with investigating the laws of matter than the laws of mind; and to hold it so much more a triumph to know the secrets of mute organisms than to understand the secret of God in his provisions for the progress of the soul in a glory and happiness outliving all organizations and systems. But it is often so with the fascinating aspirations of philosophy, falsely so called. One thing gives pre-eminence to the Bible over nature, that it is the treasury of forces in their application and results augmenting and developing through all time, and stretching on beyond the confines of time in unending continuance. Whereas the system of nature, however magnificent, is a doomed system, having in it the principle of decay, and marching in the solemn procession of the countless bodies that compose it, to a certain dissolution. The revelation of God in his word is the method of his discipline, by which he is to secure infinite results. We know but little of God's connection with nature. God upholds and conducts its movements to their final issue. It is the silent energy of power. But it is only power. There is in it no thought, no pulsation of love, no responsive voice, no action of will. God is neither felt nor recognized in all the sphere of insensate being. The vast realm lies unconscious in his hand. The immense systems are operated and moved, as dead matter, joyless and dreary, yielding a revenue, but receiving none.

But God comes into the affairs of men. He communicates himself to us, invites our knowledge, opens himself to our intercourse, craves our reverence and affection, and rewards our obedience. From the high throne of his sovereignty, he looks upon us with the heart of a father, with pity in his eye. To restore to us the wantonly forfeited bliss, he comes

into the scene of things with us. To aid us in our exaltation he gives us a teacher and lays before us the lesson to be learned. He condescends to speak and to listen. Man speaks to God, and the Most High hears and answers our request. Of much of this intervention of God it may be truly said, it is complicated with mystery. The progress of interpretation is the unfolding of the mystery; marking the process of such an unfolding illustrates the advance of truth. Christ was but little understood by those who saw him, and had intimate intercourse with him. There were many things to be known, of which he said, "ye cannot bear them now." The former discipline did its work but very slowly. The dimness of types and shadows was great. The latter dispensation, the interpretation of the types and shadows, is in like manner a discipline of tardy advancement. The distinctive name of the followers of Christ is not yet an obsolete appellation. They were disciples. All true followers are yet disciples, pondering a lesson in which the light is ever breaking in upon the mind; but yet a lesson, the end of which is not overtaken. No observer of our day can have failed to see how unsatisfied the minds of serious thinkers are in regard to the person and character of Christ. To meet this demand the best intellect of Christendom is devoting itself to investigate and elucidate the great theme. It is not now the Nicene problem; that sharp struggle belonged to another epoch of the human intellect. It was the inevitable craving to combine into a symmetrical whole the elements that seemed to be scattered up and down in the history and sayings of Jesus. It was as reasonable to seek a formal expression for the mode of the divine existence out of the glimpses so marvellously shooting across the field of their vision, as it is for a naturalist to seek for the underlying principles and common facts that distinguish genera and species in plants and animals; for classification and definition are the measure and boundaries of knowledge. Whatever we may think of the result of that gigantic discussion, it has been accepted since as so nearly exhaustive

within its range that all later conflicts have been but faint echoes of that imperial clash of arms. And yet we may doubt whether its contribution to the true interpretation of the doctrine of Christ was as great as has been sometimes imagined. So far as it furnished a formula, the terms of which embrace all that human words can convey of the thought which its framers gathered from scripture upon a subject so momentous, it may satisfy the conditions of the problem. But how little this will do towards incorporating into the life of man the life of the Son of God, and making us one with Christ, as he is one with the Father, may be easily imagined. Sharply defined and measured statements seldom touch the chords of feeling. The living Christ was the necessity, or Jesus would never have come in the flesh. That the divine should touch the human under all the common conditions of humanity was indispensable to our accepting in our life what Christ was in his life. And therefore Christ is a history — a life opened out to us under human conditions, though moved and pervaded by a divine energy. The discussion that is moving Christendom to-day is to find out this life; that is, to find the true interpretation of the gospel history. The progress of the world's sanctification is marked by the advance it makes in the spiritual likeness of Christ. And this results from a comprehension of Christ, and the application of the law of life in him to our own life. The truth evoked will work its effects. For no man doubts that the nearer the race is brought to the image of God in its moral character the higher will its elevation be. If, as Christ teaches, we are to know the Father by knowing himself, then the true yearning of man after God is to be satisfied in knowing Christ. This is the way that leadeth upwards: not a way of profound aspirings and giant strugglings after the infinite; but of humble imitations and childlike following of that Jesus who went about doing good, whose human sympathies were as clearly defined as was his divine love for his Father and our Father.

In this day when the heart of Christendom is moved

beyond all measure of former times in benevolent endeavors to extend light, to raise the fallen, to diminish the burdens and alleviate the sorrows of sin, it is not surprising that there is an evident yearning to know more of the Redeemer of sinners. The hope of the world lies in the path which was trodden by the Son of God. The proud achievements of science answer many and munificent ends. But sadly must even the philanthropist turn away from the most brilliant triumphs of knowledge with the unwelcome admission, that the lusts of the human heart will not obey the skill of the mighty enchanter. The modern alchemy, with its prodigious force of agents and re-agents, with its resistless batteries, its microscopic vision, and its adventurous assertion of power to generate even life itself, is as abortive now as was its aspiring progenitor to discover the potent elixir. The words of Jesus of Nazareth have a power which the masters of all the arts cannot wield. This power is realized as the incarnate Son of God is felt after and found in the supply he brings to the deep and ever-craving wants of our spiritual nature. The wide-spread and deep-reaching activities of this generation develop not only new capacities but new aspirations. The unfoldings of the word, if kept in even pace with the expanding life of the followers of Christ, will furnish the untriment for that life. This is God's method. It is the repetition of the past, and an upward movement to a higher plane, by the same line projected forwards. The higher truth is the higher apprehension of Christ. If the old statement contained the naked and transparent dogma, the new experience is luminous with the light of love, and the life of the Spirit. We gather into the law of our life some new facts, which the law in the word contained, but which our vision did not detect. The opaque grows transparent; the nebulous mist is resolved into clusters of stars; the sunbeams yield warmth as well as light, and the truth comes to us with its transforming agency as well as with its informing power. We no longer gaze from the outside of the paradise of God upon the bright flowers, the rare fruit,

and the sparkling fountains, but are admitted within the gates, our sense delighted with its fragrance, our taste gratified with its clusters, and our thirst refreshed with its clear waters.

If what we have intimated in these remarks is correct, the interpretation by which the truth yields a higher sanctifying influence is not a rendering of the text into a more significant form of language, but unfolding for use and application that of which all words of scripture are merely symbols. It has been laid down as a fundamental principle, "That no biblical doctrine reaches its perfect form until the latest period of revelation." So it may also be laid down as a maxim, that no revelation of God reaches a perfect interpretation until the truth it contains has been perfectly developed in the spiritual life of believers. And as the progress of time marks the growth of holiness, it is only in the end of time that the completed power of God's word will exhibit completed sanctification. In the process there must of necessity be much of laborious toiling, with only slow and gradual results. For, although it be a divine work, yet is it a work subjected to human infirmities and limitations. What work of man is not burdened with these conditions? The arts of life all go on so. The dim idea takes but an uncouth shape at first. The germinal thought is defined and expanded in many minds before the perfect machine stands in our sight, the exact counterpart and realization of the mental conception. Philologists, metaphysicians, expositors, have wrought assiduously, and it would indeed be humiliating if in the reiterated hammering no sparks were struck out. It would, nevertheless, be an unenviable task to rescue the truth of God from the vast piles of commentary under which it has been buried. Words are always cheaper than works; and, although we would not disparage the honest and godly motives which have led to the mountainous accumulation, it must be said that, after all, the actual advance is more truly made in the less definable process by which the Spirit of God informs the

understanding of those who sit down at the word, with the prayer going up from sincere hearts: "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" The more studious endeavor may have all honor for the proportion of good it does. But it is a fragment and a folly if we stop with it. The digging of the ore, the smelting and rolling, the casting and turning, the filing and fitting, are of great value in bringing out that modern wonder, a steam-engine. But the fire and the water are indispensable to completeness and efficiency. And so in myriad instances all effort at knowing is powerless, until, in the very last step of the process, the willing spirit obeys the truth, and the dead letter becomes life.

These views are confirmed by a remarkable assertion of Lord Bacon. "That form of writing in divinity," he says, "which in my judgment is most rich and precious is positive divinity, collected upon particular texts of scripture in brief observations, a thing abounding in sermons, which will vanish, but defective in books, which will remain. I am persuaded that, if the choicest and best of those observations which have been made dispersedly within this your majesty's island of Great Britain by the space of these forty years and more had been set down in continuance, it had been the best work in divinity which had been written since the apostles' times."

The philosopher, whose penetrative power led him so far into the mysteries of nature, and who at the same time bowed with a more subdued reverence before the mysteries of revelation, came to this conclusion, we imagine, from the conviction he had that truth, both in nature and religion, is known only as it is apprehended in its processes and applications. Speculation is a barren wilderness. Godly living is a well-watered garden, abounding in fruits and fragrance. It has been said: "The touch of truth is the touch of life." If so, the power of truth is the life it quickens and feeds. The truth lying cold in the understanding is the seed in the clefts of the rock, where neither sun nor dew reaches it. An analysis of the doctrine of force, and an analysis of the

doctrine of regeneration under the same conditions would be equally inefficient. Every one knows that there is in us a power of apprehension and appreciation forerunning a scientific understanding. The most artistic creations of architecture precede the determination of the laws of construction and support. Art is older than science. We see and feel before we analyze and explain. The universal admiration bestowed upon the Sistine Madonna does not imply a knowledge of the rules of drawing and grouping, or the art of coloring. There is an aesthetic intuition by which beauty in its impressiveness is felt by the cultured and uncultured. And so, also, there is a moral intuition by which truth is perceived, its force felt, its warmth enjoyed, its strength appreciated. The aim of interpretation is to satisfy this appreciative faculty, to transfuse the energizing power into the soul, to electrify the soul, to inspire its action and purify and exalt its motives. An interpreter must be something more than a scholar; he can be nothing less than a disciple. For, except he is receptive of the truth, he is only playing a game, in which the intellect is exercised and amused. And how can he interpret to others the truth which still lies outside of his own spiritual life?

There is no complete interpretation until the truth is transmuted into thoughts, feelings, purposes, actions. The end of divine knowledge is holiness, and the progress in knowledge is progress in holiness, or an assimilation to God — what the old divines called “the life of God in the soul of man,” or what is more fitly described by the apostle as “being made partakers of the divine nature.” And through this tuition and intuition the souls of believers advance, from all conditions of culture and discipline, to the same elevation of knowing and being known of God.

It is because so much of interpretation, in expositions, in controversies and discussions, in sermons and treatises, has lacked the unction of spiritual appreciation that it has fallen so far short in helpfulness. The sanctification has been slow, because the knowledge of truth has been so far

confined to the letter, and the work of the Spirit has been so exclusively in the life of the few scattered disciples, and not the all-embracing light of the whole body. And, therefore, the progress which opens before the church in hopefulness is progress in spiritual life — progress in assimilating the truth — progress in living after the divine type. As the buried coal-fields hold in trust the solar energy that in the world's progress is to be transmuted into active force, turning the shafts and driving the wheels of the world's gigantic enterprises, so the divine energy deposited in the word is to become the spiritual force, vitalizing and sustaining Christian progress, and bearing forward in the grand evolutions of truth the mightier enterprises of the church.

The elements of progress are not, then, to be sought nor found outside of and beyond the word of God, as some imagine, but within the range of revelation, and by knowing the depths of wisdom and love therein treasured. The struggle to reach the circumference of that circle radiant and crowded with the thoughts of God may weary us; while still, beyond the outermost arc of our survey there will lie fields unexplored and objects unmeasured, in never ending successions. When the living word has wrought out its possible achievements, the new Jerusalem will have come down from God out of heaven. When the race of man has comprehended in experience the entire revelation in its miracles of love and mercy, then may the Redeemer say again: "It is finished"; and he will deliver up the kingdom to the Father.

As the light which has been shining for six thousand years is still a study and a wonder to the devout lover of God's works, so the depths of God's purposes and methods of administration, as they have been shining in prophecy and promise all down the ages, are still the wonder and joy of his reverent children.

The science that detects, arranges, and classifies the facts in nature, and educes its laws, presents one of the noblest

aspects of the high endowments of the human mind. But the science of God in redemption is greater. Nothing is in the end to be feared, but much to be hoped for, from research into the secrets of the material world. The day of the just ascendancy of the truth of God, in the clear understanding and application of it, will witness the harmony of all knowledge. The firmament that showeth God's handiwork will be a brighter mirror reflecting his glory when God himself shall be better known. History and art and philosophy will join in the same song of praise, when the submissive will rejoice in God's law, and the delighted mind reverentially adores his presence. All God's works will praise him; but man, sanctified by the truth, will lead in the anthem, and all creatures, animate and inanimate, will swell the chorus.

ARTICLE V.

BETHESDA AND ITS MIRACLE.¹

BY REV. JAMES M. MACDONALD, D.D., PRINCETON, N. J.

THERE is no better example of the great value of the "Researches in Palestine," of the late Dr. Robinson, than in those made by him in connection with the Pool of Siloam. It was the first object that attracted his attention on arriving at Jerusalem.

Leaving the high level part of Zion, not included within the walls of the modern city, where the Christian cemeteries are located, he proceeded eastward along the southern wall of the city, and, passing by the Zion gate, descended along the slope towards the valley of the Tyropœon, or Cheesemakers. Entering a path which soon left the wall, he descended obliquely down the slope southeast, in the direction of Siloam. In this part the Tyropœon forms a deep

¹ John v. 1-16.