

ARTICLE VI.

THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION.

No. VI.—THE CLAIMS OF BIBLICAL THEOLOGY TO A PLACE IN OUR THEOLOGICAL SCHOOLS.

I.

I. BY Biblical Theology is sometimes understood theology which is in harmony with the Bible, and sometimes theology which has a strong biblical flavor. Without questioning the propriety of these uses of the phrase, it is to be observed that biblical theology is a well-established technical term, indicating a division of theological science.

1. In its narrowest sense, the term has been applied to collections of proof-texts.

2. In a broader sense, it has been applied to outlines of doctrine and duty, constructed for popular use, and distinguished as biblical in statement and arrangement, rather than scientific.

3. In a still broader sense, it has been applied to a systematic formulation of Bible doctrines, made without special reference to current systems of doctrine, and with the purpose of constituting a standard for the examination of such systems. Of this scope was the earliest elaborate work upon the subject, Zachariae's "Biblical Theology: or, Inquiry into the Biblical Ground of the Principal Theological Doctrines" (1771-75-86).¹ In this sense Professor Tholuck, as late as 1843, understood the term. "The department of biblical dogmatic theology," he says, "is immediately derived from that of topics [collected proof-texts]. In other words, the system of Christian faith is expressed with simplicity, in sentences which are founded on the proof-texts of the Bible. In addition to the simple statement of Christian principles, this department will allow an exegetical proof that the principles are taught in the Bible, and also a brief scientific confirmation of them."² Were the term "biblical dogmatics" (or, as Professor Tholuck expresses it, "biblical dogmatic theology"), this would be the only accurate understanding of it. It is sought, however, to cover by the term a somewhat broader field; and the word "theology," though not precise, is employed in place of "dogmatics," as upon the whole the best.

¹ *Biblische Theologie, oder Untersuchung des biblischen Grundes der vornehmsten theologischen Lehren.*

² "Theological Encyclopaedia and Methodology," by Professor Tholuck of Halle. Translated by Professor Park in the *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 1844. See p. 552.

Before proceeding to the definition of this broader field, it will be advantageous to glance briefly at the treatment which the Bible has received in connection with the development of Christian doctrine.

In the first Christian ages, doctrinal and ethical positions were maintained almost exclusively by citations from the Gospels and from the apostolic writings. Controversies (like those of Justin Martyr and Tertullian) with the Jews necessarily involved an apologetic use of the Old Testament also, and at least some assumptions respecting its relations to the New Testament. Those three great doctrinal sections of the New Testament, the Epistles to the Galatians, the Romans, and the Hebrews, constituted, moreover, in the method of their reasoning, an abiding providential incentive to an examination of the Old Testament in its relation to the New, and hence to some adequate apprehension of revelation in its entirety. These hopeful tendencies at once toward a biblical, and a comprehensively biblical, development of doctrine were seriously broken in upon by the allegorical exegesis which was brought into vogue by the Alexandrian school. The great mind of Augustine sufficiently emancipated itself from such conceits to go strongly back upon the Bible for proofs of doctrine, and for light upon the developing kingdom of God; and his proposition, "*Novum Testamentum in Vetere latet, Vetus in Novo patet,*" did much toward placing the Old Testament and the New in at least a proper theoretical relation in the thinking of the church. After Augustine, until the Reformation, the tendency toward recognizing tradition as authoritative and toward interpreting the Bible by the light of ecclesiastical deliverances was fatal to a biblical development of doctrine. With the Reformation the Bible was restored to its ancient authority; the doctrines of the New Testament were made the cornerstone of the new liberty; and the Old Testament was studied with an enthusiasm which has left striking marks in the writings of the Reformers, and which materially affected their views of civil and ecclesiastical polity. Reuchlin, in maintaining just at this time the independence of exegesis, materially furthered this good movement. Nevertheless, the Reformers attended so exclusively to fundamental doctrines, and devoted their efforts so largely to establishing those doctrines from the Bible as a whole, that they were predominantly dogmatic in their use of the Bible, rather than historical. They maintained that grace, though multiform, was one, from Paradise on; and that the Old and New Testaments were essentially different only in form. And these propositions, though true, led them to study the Bible as a unit and as dogma, rather than in a distributive manner and as history. Bright harbingers there were of a truer method, particularly in Calvin's expositions of the Old Testament, which drew upon him from Lutheran critics the charge of being a Judaizer; but they were harbingers only. The seventeenth century was marked by struggles toward a historical method, and by violent opposition to the same. The

Reformed church was aggressive in the new movement, and the Lutheran, conservative. For example, the Lutherans impeached the orthodoxy of Calixtus (†1656) upon this ground, among others, that he denied that the doctrine of the Trinity was taught in the Old Testament; while the Reformed church permitted itself to be greatly influenced by Cocceius (†1669), who laid down truly scientific principles of exegesis, who insisted upon historical methods in theology, and whose illustrious followers constituted a distinct school in theology.

In the eighteenth century Bengel (†1752), whose eminent piety largely disarmed opposition to his aggressive critical and exegetical methods, maintained that the Bible records an organic and historical revelation, and that this revelation is to be studied with painstaking attention to its progressive stages. He was a Lutheran, and the Württemberg school of theologians followed in his steps. But Germany in the eighteenth century was penetrated with that deism which has given place to rationalism in the nineteenth century. Consequently, the evangelical movement toward historical methods in theology was espoused by deism and by rationalism, which, demanding historical methods likewise, sought by them to trace the origin of biblical religion to the shrewdness of natural leaders of men. All who furthered the latter movement failed to go to this extreme; but their tendency was hardly less mischievous, as in the case, for example, of Michaelis (†1791), the commentator on the laws of Moses. Thus it came about that the rationalist Gabler (†1827), in an academic oration, "*De Justo Discrimine Theologiae Biblicae et Dogmaticae*" (1787), first clearly defined a method in theology which contained the possibility of realizing the aim of the evangelical movement toward historical methods, and which has been worked out into what is known as biblical theology — Gabler's phrase being retained. Thus it came about, also, that biblical theology, in the broad sense in which Gabler defined it, was almost monopolized by rationalistic theologians far into the present century. Professor Tholuck points this out in connection with the passage already cited from his "*Encyclopaedia and Methodology*." Doubtless, the proneness of rationalists to occupy this field, and the obnoxious conclusions at which they arrived in it, operated to its prejudice, and delayed evangelical activity in its cultivation. Since the above-mentioned work by Professor Tholuck was published (1844), however, much evangelical attention has been paid to biblical theology, as is indicated, particularly, by the works of Schmid (*New Testament*, 1853), Schulz (*Old Testament*, 1869), and Oehler (*Old Testament*, 1873-74),¹ and by numerous

¹ For a masterly summary of the history of the subject, and discussion of its idea and method of treatment, together with copious notes and references upon the same, see Oehler's *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, translated in Clark's *Foreign Theological Library*, which is capable of becoming an epoch-making book in the intellectual and spiritual life of earnest biblical students.

special treatises, as, for example, Dr. J. P. Thompson's "Theology of Christ" (1871).¹

This historical survey shows why it was impossible for biblical theology to become a division of theological science prior to the eighteenth century, and why an adequate evangelical treatment of it has been delayed until within a few decades. This retrospect suggests, also, that the cultivation of biblical theology has thus far been principally confined to Germany. But chiefly this review presents a key to the exact place which biblical theology is designed to fill. Biblical theology, as the review shows, was gradually come upon in an effort to establish a proper method of induction in the science of theology. First, conscientious scholars contended for an independent exegesis. Then they contended for a historical treatment of the Bible. Then they contended for a "justum discrimen theologiae biblicae et dogmaticae"—for an exact historical determination of the doctrinal content of the Bible as a starting-point and criterion for systematic theology.

4. To return, now, from the historical survey to the definition of biblical theology. As stated above, the earlier evangelical conception regarded this division of theological science as "a systematic formularization of Bible doctrines, made without special reference to current systems of doctrine, and with the purpose of constituting a standard for the examination of such systems." Biblical theology, so limited, would include purely doctrinal matter only, so that it might more properly be called biblical dogmatics, or, to use Professor Tholuck's term, "biblical dogmatic theology." But such a scope, though admirable in itself, is not sufficiently broad to cover the field necessary to be covered at this point. For,

(1) Doctrines, throughout the Bible, are not so much stated as implied. Particularly in the Old Testament, pure statements of doctrine are rare.

¹ A part of the literature of this subject is to be found in special treatises not written in the direct service of biblical theology, but belonging under it none the less, e.g. Hengstenberg's "Christology of the (Old Testament)" (1829-35); the doctrinal divisions of Neander's "Planting and Training of the Christian Church" (1832), and "Life of Jesus" (1837); Lechler's "Apostolic and Post-Apostolic Age, with regard to Divinity and Unity in Doctrine and Life" (1848); Reuss's "History of the Christian Theology of the Apostolic Age" (1852); Messner's "Doctrine of the Apostles" (1856); Beom's "Doctrine of the Messianic Kingdom among the First Christians, according to the Acts of the Apostles" (1863), and numerous more specific works. The last treatise illustrates the tendency to topical methods in biblical theology, as does (for a recent example) Laidlaw's "Bible Doctrine of Man" (Cunningham Lectures, 1878). Of the literature bearing directly upon the subject, that written from a rationalistic point of view is extensive, and in some respects valuable. To the leading evangelical writers already mentioned, may be added: Usteri (Paulinischen Lehrbegriffes, 1829, etc.), Stendel (Old Test., 1840), Lutz (Biblische Dogmatik, 1847), Hävernick (Old Test., 1848), Hahn (New Test., 1854).

Even the Messiah and his kingdom, in the Old Testament, are less doctrines than history foreshadowed. To extract from the Bible, then, only so much doctrine as can be found purely expressed in it, is to extract only a part of the richness of the Bible, and to extract that part without its full flavor.

(2) Again, the Bible is not revelation, but only the divinely authenticated record of revelation. The real revelation is the special divine acts in the history of redemption, — so much of his creative action and of his relation to sinless man as he has been pleased to make known to the fallen race; his treatment of a succession of individuals, within and outside the chosen lineage; his destruction of all but the remnants of a hopelessly wicked world; his dealings with the patriarchal line; the dramatic occurrences which he made the background of the national life of the Israelites; the theocratic code and government; his will and purposes as he gradually unfolded them throughout Israelitish history; that apprehension of divine things which, little by little, he caused men to receive — particularly as portrayed in the national history of the Israelites, their biography, and the books of Old Testament wisdom; and then those divine deeds of which the New Testament is only the brief epitome, and which, were they written out, could not — to use the ardent language of one who lived within their memory — be contained by “even the world itself.” It is this concrete revelation, of which the Bible is only the divinely authenticated outline-record, which, studied by the light of the Bible, is to constitute the real fountain-head of doctrine.

In the division of theological science under consideration, then, not only the expressed, but the involved doctrines of the Bible must be ascertained; and in addition, by the light of its divine record, the real revelation — in its beginnings, in its successive stages, in its culmination, and in the relations of part to part, and of all the parts to the whole — must be grasped, comprehended, and made the basis of just generalizations. This is the great task rendered necessary at this point by a proper method of induction in the science of theology, and by the form in which the data for the science are found. For this, “biblical dogmatics” is not a sufficiently broad name. For this, biblical theology is not a precise name, but is employed as the best brief descriptive term. Gabler defined it, “as the statement of ‘the religious ideas of Scripture as an historical fact, so as to distinguish the different times and subjects, and so also the different stages in the development of these ideas.’” Oehler assigns to it “the task of delineating the biblical religion according to its progressive development, and the multiplicity of the forms in which it appears.”

II. After this discussion of the scope of biblical theology, it will be profitable to note with some care its relations to the other divisions and departments of theological science.

1. It is the function of one department of theological science to open up

the Bible. Here is, first, philology — the sacred languages, and their cognates. Here is, secondly, light on the books of the Bible (introduction) — their origin; the history and criticism of their text; all possible light upon them from history, archaeology, geography, natural history, etc.; and the internal light derivable from their language, style, method of argument, etc. Here is, thirdly, interpretation (hermeneutics) — how the books, thus made readable, and thus rendered luminous, are to be understood. This threefold work constitutes the great department of exegesis — of giving to the Bible its proper voice. It cannot be adequately worked, except as it is divided into two parts, corresponding to the two main languages, Hebrew (A), and Greek (B).

2. The function of another department of theological science is purely historical. Christianity is a history as old as the world. It is a series of facts coeval with the race. The fundamental sciences are predicating themselves more and more upon history. It is so with the physical sciences. It is so with political economy, with sociology, with finance. It is so in great degree even with the speculative sciences. Surely, then, theology, the most historical of sciences, ought to anchor itself in a perfect mastery of history. All possible light upon the history of the Israelites; all possible contributions to the same from the history of contemporaneous peoples; every scrap of knowledge about them derivable from coins, from monuments, from ruins, from sepulchers, — this is the first division in this department of our science, viz. the history of the Jewish church (A). The other division is the history of the Christian church, — what constituted “the fulness of the time;” the history of John the Baptist; the history of Christ; the history of the Apostolic church; the history of every subsequent age of the Church (B). Of all fascinating and limitless departments of history, none begins to equal these two. Here theological science, if it is wise to discern its vantage-ground, will intrench itself, will erect its impregnable citadel, and will derive its choicest inspirations.

3. Each of the two departments of our science already outlined, is dependent on the other; but each is sharply distinguishable from the other. The field of each is peculiar. The field of each is vast. The qualities of mind essential to the highest excellence in each are diverse. The characteristic of the one is language; the characteristic of the other is history. But when both have done their best service, a third department of the science requires to be added, which is equally distinct from the other two. The Bible has now been opened by the first. The second has brought forth the inexhaustible treasures of history to substantiate and illuminate that concrete revelation of which the Bible is only the record, and which, since the Bible was completed, has been spreading like leaven, and growing like a grain of mustard-seed. It becomes, then, the function of the third department of theological science to gather the essentials out of the Bible and out of the history; to arrange and systemize them; to distinguish

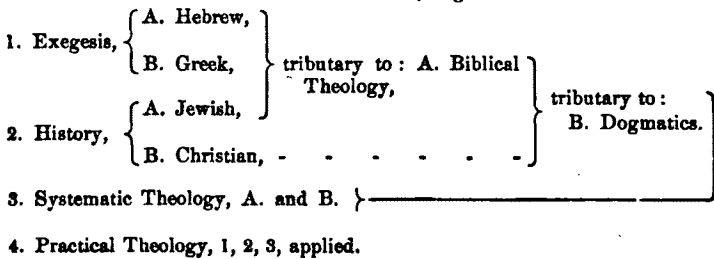
their substance from their form; to collate them with the teachings of nature and of human nature; and out of the whole to elaborate such a system as shall be incapable of misapprehension, as shall meet the proper requirements of reason, and as shall constitute the norm of a true ethics, and of a true ecclesiastical polity. The mind ought to, and necessarily will, digest the Bible, digest the history, and collate both with nature, with human nature, and with reason; and this is why exegesis and history must issue in systematic theology.

4. The fourth department of theological science is all these applied in practical theology.

Now biblical theology logically belongs to the third of these departments. It is not exegesis, but a systemization of the results of exegesis. It is not history, but an exhibition of the theology of the history, up to the date when the canon closed. To combine it with exegesis (as is sometimes attempted), is to divert the exegete from his proper task, and is possibly to bias him in his work. To combine it with history (as might appear natural), is to divert the historian from his proper task, and is to render possible his pursuit of history with a dogmatic spirit. Biblical theology is, rather, the necessary introduction (A) to systematic theology. It seeks, as it were, to restore systematic theology as it stood when the canon closed, and to afford a point of departure for completed systematic theology, which, for convenience, let us here term dogmatics (B). At this point it belongs, and nowhere else; and its magnitude entitles it to constitute a chair by itself.¹

In support of the latter remark, some of the obligations incumbent upon it may be stated. (1) It must so master the essentials of introduction and of hermeneutics as to be able to present a comprehensive and true view of the contents, relative value, and essential import of the several books of the Bible. (2) It must so master Jewish and Apostolic history as to be able to delineate the exact progress of revelation, and to place the doctrines and duties of the several ages against their proper backgrounds. (3) It must so master Mosaism, prophetism, the Old Testament wisdom, Judaism, and the theology of Christ and of the apostles, as to be able to present a symmetrical historical exhibition of the full-rounded biblical doctrine

¹ In the outline of theological science, as here maintained, the several departments and divisions with their subordinations, might be exhibited as follows :



and ethics. (All these tasks it must perform comprehensively, not working in details as exegesis and history must, but gathering the results of exegesis and history into clear, connected, exhaustive, and unanswerable propositions.) (4) In connection with these tasks it will constitute the best mouth-piece for comprehensive instruction of a practical nature on these points: (a) The genuineness, authenticity, and history of each book in the Bible; (b) The peculiarities of each book; the peculiar aim of it; the distinctive course of thought in it (e.g. Job, Ecclesiastes, Romans, Galatians, James, etc.); (c) The connection between the Old Testament and the New; the law of the Old Testament being substantially in the New Testament, and the gospel of the New Testament being substantially in the Old Testament (under this to be included the relations of the types to the history; types of Christ to his person; sacrifices to the atonement, etc.). Here is certainly all that any most competent chair can perform. Indeed, in Germany, the tendency is to make the biblical theology of the Old Testament and that of the New separate specialties.

II.

In view of the magnitude of the subject, in view of its important logical position in the science of theology, and in view of the gigantic labors which are being expended upon it by the scholarship of other lands, it would seem hardly necessary to urge the claims of biblical theology to a place in our theological schools. Its neglect by them, however, is almost universal. In some twenty, at least, of the leading American seminaries there is not a single chair exclusively devoted to it; and if it is treated at all, it is accorded only an incidental place. Fortunately, in two or three of these institutions the importance of providing such a chair is receiving serious thought. In the hope of extending and deepening such thought the following practical considerations are adduced.

I. Such a chair would constitute a grateful relief to the department of systematic theology. There is no most elaborate treatise in that department which does not protest that it is only an introduction to the subject. There is no most competent lecturer upon it who does not find himself cramped for time, compelled to treat important topics in a summary manner, and forced to abridge those discussions with students which are all-important. There is no most efficient student in it who is not more or less confused during the course by the wide range which it at present includes, and by the vast mass of matter given him. If he is exegetical, he is overwhelmed by the flood of proof-texts to be critically examined. If he is metaphysical, he finds himself floundering in the philosophical writers who come up from day to day. If a deep spiritual nature is his principal endowment, he is perhaps hopelessly prejudiced against theological learning, because an exclusively biblical attitude is so rarely maintained by his great instructor. All this cannot at present be otherwise. The Bible is

the starting-point with the chair ; but its discussions must include revealed religion as nature and human nature have thrown light upon it, as Christian history has elucidated it, and as a true philosophy has been able to interpret it. But if nature and human nature and a true philosophy sufficiently mark the chair, Christian history and the strictly biblical side of the subject must suffer ; while, if the main stress is put upon the latter, the paramount function of the chair to hold forth an invulnerable philosophy of the Christian religion is at an end. What a relief, then, would be afforded if biblical theology in its wide ramifications might be separately treated as introductory to dogmatics ; and if the latter chair might be free to devote all its power to the history of doctrine in the Christian church, and to its philosophical elaboration and vindication upon the basis of a sound biblical theology already laid !

II. The work of such a chair would tend to establish trustworthy correctives to dogmatic error. It is becoming fashionable to stigmatize dogmatics. "Away with dogma!" is the cry. As if men were not bound to think ; as if thinking had not necessarily to elaborate itself into systems ; as if, in every age, some system of thought were not dominant in the life of the world ; as if a most monstrous system of thinking were not dictating this very cry ; and as if trained masters of religious thought had not proved, over and over again, the salvation of the church ! What would have become of the church, but for a theologian to write the Epistles to the Galatians and to the Romans ? but for Athanasius ? but for John Calvin ? Oh ! most short-sighted and harebrained cry : "Away with dogma !" But in the intense crises of religious thought no theologian, and no era in theology, is exempt from the danger of an error here or of an extreme there ; and worse, the theologian and the theological era are in danger to be misapprehended by mediocre minds. In these perils, the Word is the safeguard. It has always proved so. If, then, some theologians were set to travel back and forth over it alone, might they not be expected more and more to hold up before the church trustworthy correctives to dogmatic error and misapprehension ? Let us have, therefore, a dogmatics great and ever growing ; as the brightest human character in the Bible was also the greatest master of dogmatics, let us assign to the brightest lights of the church its cultivation ; but let us contribute to its purity and efficiency by providing also a dogmatics of the Word pure and simple — a biblical theology.

III. Such a chair would be opportune, in view of certain peculiarities of the religious life of the time. We are having, and are to have, a race of lay preachers. Also, the great impetus which uniform lessons are giving to Sunday-schools, and the large market which these lessons are opening for a cheap and popular literature in elucidation of the Bible, are making thousands and millions of exegetes and theologians on their own account. Wonderful are their discoveries, startling their theories,

astounding their canons of interpretation. An examination of the mass of Sunday-school "helps" now in the market, or unexpected incursions on the same day into a thousand Teachers' meetings and Bible-classes in different parts of the country, would result in revelations undreamed of by those unacquainted with the mischiefs, as well as with the advantages, of this great movement. Now the laity, whether they preach, or rise and fall upon the waves of the Sunday-school movement, or only experience the indirect influences of these agencies, must have a theology; and it must be biblical rather than dogmatic; and, above all, it must be true and strong. And whoever else is to give it to them, it is certain that ministers must bear their part in the work. Hence the immediate and urgent need of well-manned chairs of biblical theology in our theological schools, both in order to counteract evil, and to turn important providential agencies to the best account.

IV. Finally, such a chair would be of great practical service in the training of preachers. It is a part of the duty of a theological school to maintain such a standard of scholarship and of intellectual acumen as shall inspire its students with a love of sound learning, as shall impart to them reverence for that thoughtful and conservative spirit which it is the part of sound learning to maintain, and as shall provide for such of them as are specially endowed the opportunity for large special acquirements, even during the period of the ordinary course. These scholarly functions of a theological school cannot be over-estimated. If, then, a theological school is bent upon performing this part of its duty, how can it neglect the cultivation of a specialty in which both scholarship and intellectual acumen are pre-eminently required, and which, logically, is the bridge between the data and the conclusions of theology? But it is a far more important part of the duty of a theological school to turn out mighty preachers of the Word. If it does not do that, it is a failure. No matter how splendid the intellectual discipline it may impart, no matter how staunch a bulwark it may be of the faith, if its graduates are not powerful ambassadors for Christ, it misses its great end.

1. Now it is of fundamental importance to the preacher that he shall know the peculiarities of each book of the Bible—for example, of Job, or of Ecclesiastes; that he shall know the aim of each book—for example, of Daniel, or of John; that he shall know the line of thought in each book—for example, in Romans or in Hebrews; that he shall know the relative value of the books—for example, of Isaiah as compared with Ezekiel, or of Galatians as compared with James; and that he shall know the relations of the several books and sections of the Bible one to another, but particularly of the Old Testament to the New. Without a thorough knowledge on these points he will preach ignorantly and erroneously; he will be liable to take mutually contradictory and damaging positions respecting various peculiarities of the Bible; his growth in the Scriptures

will be small, and he will work at a constant disadvantage in his sermonizing and public utterance. But to impart a thorough, comprehensive, and deeply-grounded knowledge on these points is the primary duty of biblical theology.

2. And yet such knowledge — rarely though it is found in any considerable perfection in the average minister — is of comparatively slight service beside another sort of knowledge which it is the paramount duty of biblical theology to impart. The Bible is a great mine of hidden truth. To gain detailed knowledge about its several divisions is only like settling the boundaries and determining the trends of the rock upon a surface which overspreads inexhaustible stores of gold far underneath. It is the great ideas which are in the Bible; it is the onward march of its divine events; it is the purpose steadily unfolding; it is the shafts of heavenly light struck out from time to time amidst the darkness; it is the morning star, rising out of Judaism, like that other star which blazed over Bethlehem; it is the Christ come in all his ineffable and incomparable glory; it is the kingdom set up, and unfolding already in its first decades, its essential principles, characteristics, affinities, laws, powers, sanctions, and inspirations; it is that foregleam of infinite cycles which broke at the last upon the vision of that disciple whom Jesus loved, — it is all this, set duly in order, bound into a whole, held in its glory before the eye of the mind, let fall in its warmth to abide forever in the heart, which the preacher pre-eminently needs, and which it is the function of biblical theology to give him. Through it he may be caught up to the third heaven. Through it he may hear unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. After that he will be able to speak well.

R. W.