

ARTICLE IV.

SUGGESTIONS AS TO MODIFICATIONS OF THE
DOGMATIC SYSTEM TAUGHT IN THE CON-
GREGATIONAL SCHOOLS AND CHURCHES, RE-
QUIRED AT THE PRESENT TIME.

BY THE REV. FRANK H. FOSTER, PH. D., PROFESSOR OF CHURCH HISTORY,
OBERLIN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY.

It is probable that at the opening of the late civil war in the United States the Congregational churches East and West were as heartily united in the acceptance of that general system of doctrine known as New School Calvinism, or technically New England Theology, as any body of free churches in the world ever were. Dr. Nathaniel W. Taylor had just passed away. Professor Edwards A. Park was at the height of his influence. The struggles of the past with encroaching error and with bad systems of administration were finished, and the churches were ready to enter upon new fields with mutual confidence and with common courage.

But this degree of union was the outcome of a troubled history. Scarcely were Pilgrims and Puritans upon the soil of the new world when disintegrating forces began to operate among them. When a century had passed, an Arminianism had crept in among them which called forth the earnest opposition of the great founder of the distinctive New England Theology, Jonathan Edwards. It was a thoroughly rationalistic Arminianism, born of the age when Deism was rife, and adopted in America by churches in which vital and biblical piety had faded away. It was natural that it

should be met by methods somewhat akin to those which were employed to sustain it, for in reasoning with an opponent, it is necessary to occupy to some extent common ground with him; and so it came about that the reply was largely rational, and produced the impression upon posterity of one entirely so. It is a strange phenomenon that Jonathan Edwards, the most ethereal of all New England theologians, the most profound in his spiritual experiences, and the author of a great spiritual treatise, that upon the *Religious Affections*, should be famous chiefly for writings in which the logical element is predominant, his *Freedom of the Will*, his *Original Sin*, and his *Nature of Virtue*. But the weapons with which he fought his actual battles were believed to have the virtue of the victor in them, and his successors could but imitate his example. Their tendencies and training led to this, and when a new struggle came, again the nature of the contest thrust upon them favored the development of a purely rational style of argument. The Unitarians had no Scripture to stand upon, and the real reason of their resistance to orthodoxy had to be discovered in rational misconceptions, and answered by rational considerations. And thus, though the Bible was never laid aside, nor consciously subordinated, the strength and enthusiasm of the argument lay in the ratiocination, and the tone of the developing theology was decidedly a rationalistic one. And when the result was reached, and there was what might be called a "system" of New England Theology, it still bore that rationalizing characteristic.

The homogeneousness of the result arose from still another feature, from the comparatively limited area occupied by these contests, and its almost perfect seclusion from

from the old sources. They were men of wide reading, but that reading was within the limits of the Calvinistic writers. They modified here and there, as they were convinced at minor points by their opponents, as was often the case, or as their own common sense and the teachings of the Scriptures compelled them; but no really new and fresh element wafted from some region more highly favored than their own, ever reached them. Scotland contributed a little help, but Scotland was a second Calvinistic New England. And thus, in particular, no new influences came to preserve what was falling into oblivion in the school as it was constituted, the more spiritual conceptions and arguments which the earliest Reformation theology had had and which still played a large part in the definitions of the Westminster Confession.

Looking, now, at this perfected New England system, as it emerged about the year 1860, the historical critic must admit, I think, that certain great gains had been achieved. The long and intense study which had been given to the will from Edwards to Taylor, had produced modifications in psychology and in the doctrine of the will, which are a permanent gain to philosophic and theologic science. So the practical outcome of these abstruser discussions, in the doctrine of conversion and in the strenuous, pungent, and effective revival preaching characteristic of the New England pulpits, was of great value, and so adapted to American needs as to have become now almost universal in this country. Some excrescences produced by the excessive scholasticism of the Calvinistic system makers were removed. And some mysteries, which had received pretended solutions were permitted to fall back into their true realm. This positive service is not yet complete, and New England theology has something at this day still to do. The theory of the nature of virtue propounded by Edwards, was undeveloped and unapplied by him, and has largely remained unapplied to the system to this day. The doctrine of the atonement, partic-

ularly, needs restatement in its light.¹ These permanent gains made by the system, and these undeveloped truths presented by it, should come down into the theology of today as precious possessions, or as problems having a peculiar demand upon and interest for our constructive theologians.

But the same historical critic will perceive certain defects in New England theology. It must be admitted that it is unchurchly and unhistorical in its tone. Congregationalists have had little sense of membership in the great, universal Christian church, little perception of the fact that the church is a positive divine institution, possessing authority from Christ to proclaim the everlasting truth, and have laid little weight upon the teachings of the history of the church as the record of the experience of a progressive society under the guidance of the Holy Ghost. The tone of teaching and preaching has been, as above said, rationalistic, as if Christianity might as well have begun in the current year as nineteen hundred years ago, as if the preacher stood simply upon the basis of the reasons he was able to render in his own individual person for what he had to say, as if the appeal were in every case, without further ado, directly to the reason of the hearer now and here. And the theology has also been unbiblical in that it has exalted Natural Theology to a position which it cannot occupy, by incorporating in it elements derived from revealed religion without an acknowledgment of their source.

Such, in brief outline, was the condition of Congregational theology at the outbreak of the great war. At its close a new era came in, an era in which we are now living, and amid the drift and confusion of which we find ourselves sometimes in sad bewilderment. The past thirty years have been the most remarkable in the history of the world for development in material science and the application of this science to the

¹ See an attempt by the present writer, *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 1891, p. 104.

provision for the material wants of man. A new materialistic philosophy has also arisen, associated with the names of Darwin, Huxley, and Spencer, and has done the double work of compelling a remodelling of some of the standard arguments of systematic theology, and of furnishing novel and perplexing further problems to apologetics. New branches of metaphysical and psychologic science have also arisen. All this has been going on in the English world, and the result in our theological thinking has been immediately felt. But now, for the first time, we have begun really to feel the effects of German theological research and speculation. Although Professor Stuart did much to introduce German learning into the country, it had little real influence upon our thinking till the present, new epoch was ushered in. Professor Henry B. Smith, who was the first scholar of Congregational antecedents who had received a competent German education and obtained a place where he could put it to good use, exercised a positive broadening influence. Professor G. P. Fisher, the first competent teacher of Church History our churches ever had, helped in the same direction. Increasing numbers of our young men spent a longer or shorter time in German universities, and formed a taste for the theological ideas of that country, where they did not make great personal attainments. Professor E. C. Smyth did much, and would have done more had he not been hampered by limitations of time, which illustrated and proved the unhistoric spirit in which our principal Seminary had been conceived and was till the last decade administered. By 1871 the new National Council was ready to declare our fellowship open to Arminians upon equal terms with Calvinists. And now, what with good scholarship and poor, with philosophy and criticism, with German conservatives and German radicals teaching our young men and reprinting their works in our own tongue, the flood of miscellaneous ideas has swept in upon us, and the seclusion and quiet of the former period have passed away,

never to return; and with them has passed away the time when our cherished New England theology, produced under different circumstances, and directed to meeting other issues, is competent for the instruction of our youth or the edification of our churches.

Now, it is the duty of systematic theology to master such a situation as this. The church historian may quietly study the past, and bring what light he can to bear upon the present; but the responsibility of bringing order out of chaos is not his, nor that of any other member of a theological faculty but the systematic professor. He deals with the absolute truth, and his pupils must have an answer, when they ask for clearness and light. His task is alleviated by the evident consideration that the foundations are laid too deep to have been carried away by this flood, that the Christian system was not created yesterday, and does not need to be recreated to-day. Yet readjustment to meet new circumstances, incorporation of new materials, the reapplication of neglected principles and truths,—these are the perennial problems of systematic theology, and they are the problems of our present era.

What, then, are the dominating ideas under which the theological system to be taught in our seminaries at the present day, must be constructed? It will be the purpose of the present article to contribute something to the answer of that question.

I. The system must be constructed under the influence of the rehabilitated idea of the church as a supernatural

hension of the truth has been a growth, and one often of exceeding slowness, in the church. Three hundred years had to elapse from the birth of Christ before his true deity was clearly perceived by his church; four hundred and fifty, before it was clearly perceived that in him two natures, each perfect and entire, were united in one person; more than five hundred, before the initiative of the Spirit in conversion could be clearly set forth; fifteen hundred, before the doctrine of justification by faith received a full and correct statement; and still the system is incomplete. This has been God's method. It is the slowness of him who never hastes, and yet who is bringing in his glory and the knowledge of his name as fast as possible. He has wrought out his results by methods which have given free play to the natural activities of men, by their controversies and by their disputes, but underneath all their hesitation and amid all their ignorance, he has been present, and has been fulfilling his promise, to guide his people at last "into all truth."

Now, here is for the theologian, and what is equally important, for his pupils, freedom and peace of mind. "God is on the field." What he has taught us will never pass away; and what he has yet to teach us will come in spite of all the contradiction of men, if we are in the Spirit, and depend upon him. The system that begins with a distinct recognition of the agency of God in the teaching of the church will have from the beginning the promise of sound and sure results.

Hence the knowledge of truth which the church has, does not depend upon the same evidence, or lie in the same plane with the convictions of a philosophical club. The philoso-

knows only as much as he himself clearly sees: the theologian stands in the midst of a witnessing church, in which he is and remains a pupil, not the Master. The philosopher may conceivably gain new light to-morrow which will overthrow his most cherished doctrines: the theologian hopes for an increasing clearness of apprehension of such truths, but he does not contemplate their overthrow as a possibility. The club has what greatness there is in the men who compose it: the church is greater than the men, because in it there is the Spirit, God.

This conception cuts up the rationalistic spirit, which is one of the defects of our past system needing remedy now, by the roots. We shall have no more final appeal in our schools to reason in the meaning of (very) common sense, or of Scotch philosophy, or of the philosophic dogmas of half a dozen heathen, when it is felt from the beginning that the teacher is above all God, and that he is present to teach every student who opens his ear to the divine voice. And we shall not have in the pulpit that uncertainty of utterance, and that practical spirit of apology, in the bad sense of the word, which has sometimes been perceived among us, when the preacher feels that he is the instrument for uttering the precious truths which the Spirit of God with higher than human wisdom has taught the church. And all this improvement will be in the line of answering the difficulties of the day.

If the living Spirit is in the church, then many lessons are to be learned from the course the development of doctrine has actually taken as to the permanent and supreme elements of Christian doctrine. Take the doctrine of prevenient grace, for example,—that man is so wicked in his natural condition that he never turns to God in true repentance except the Spirit of God persuasively move him, and that such influences of the Spirit always effect their designed result,—and, as it seems to me, no system of theology

formed under the influence of the historical sense can omit such a doctrine. The first time the issue between it and the theory of the incorrupt condition of our nature and of that freedom of the will which has generally been opposed to it, was made in the fifth century, the church finally adopted the doctrine of prevenient grace. When the Reformation, the first great religious revival after the slow creeping death of the Middle Ages, came, the doctrine was reaffirmed, and was indeed logically necessary to the principal efficient forces of Protestantism. In the following century it was again disputed by the Dutch Arminians, but reaffirmed by the general voice of the churches at Dort. In the next century it was denied by a movement in America, which by logical progress has resulted in Unitarianism and Naturalism, but the denial was answered by the reaffirmation of the doctrine by Edwards, by which the foundation was laid for all our Christian activity since. The voice of the history of the church is for the doctrine, and the reverent believer in the presence of a supernatural power in the church can but give force to this consideration. The doctrine survives from age to age, and contains in it evidently the hidden power of God, for he bears witness to it in blessing its proclamation.

Now, controversy as to the correctness of this particular interpretation aside, if this be a legitimate use of the history of the church, it evidently simplifies the task of the systematic theologian in times of confusion, like our own, in a very appreciable degree. The great main doctrines of the system are easily determined, and their substance is not to be modified. The theories upon which they rest may need, here and there, some improvement, their proportionate treatment in the system may be changed by the exigencies of the day, but in the main they are to be untouched. No thinker of any soberness can expect to-day to set forth anything very new, which shall be at the same time true, upon the fundamental doctrines of the historical system, the Trinity,

the fall and ruin of man, the atonement, election, justification by faith, sanctification by the Spirit, the eternity of rewards and punishments. He will expect no light from any philosophy of evolution which makes the Fall a "fall upward." History will also help the theologian somewhat in judging of new issues which may be presented to us from time to time. The history of the Calvinistic churches raises a supposition, as it seems to me, against the theory of the necessity of the presentation of the historic Christ as an element of a Christian probation, which has been proposed among us. Whatever the practical importance, yes necessity, of such a presentation, the Reformed theology, from Marburg down, has reserved a place for the operation of the Spirit beyond the bounds of all the ordinary means of grace. Does it lie in the path of genuine progress to forsake this spiritual principle of our aggressive Calvinistic history, and adopt a principle derived from the Lutheran system and intimately associated there with other elements which have checked the spirituality and limited the activity of that communion? Here is an element of German thought which our historic development will forbid us—will it not?—to accept without at least stronger arguments than have yet been adduced in its favor. At least, history here serves the constructive theologian by whispering a caution.

All these great advantages are to be secured, if a living sense of the church as a divine institution, in which the Spirit is supernaturally operative at every moment, be maintained in the mind of the teacher of systematic theology

cation. It is the company of the redeemed, whose redemption is an accomplished and conscious fact. If any consequences for the construction of a theological system follow from that fact, they are certainly easily explicable and evident to any living Christian. It is customary, to be sure, to begin the system with some supposed ultimate fact, which all men, Christian or not Christian, must accept, and construct the system by successive steps from that point. But is there in fact *any* such universally accepted truth to form the basis of a theological edifice? Certainly the principle of causation might be denominated such a one, if any can. But the school of Mill deny that principle. In fact, whether it be clearly recognized or not, every system begins with something which is for that system a postulate, rather than a universally accepted truth. Why then not make the supernatural fact of the Christian church the postulate? Let the systematic divine say: "We begin with the assumption that there is in the world a church, composed of persons who by a power not their own, have been born again, are conformed in their deepest purposes of life to the divine standard, which has been evidenced to them as such by the knowledge of God into which they have been brought by the experience of the new birth. It will be our purpose to develop the doctrine of that church from the standpoint in presentation and in proof, of one who stands within its sacred circle."

If the men whom this teacher addresses, know by their own experience that there is such a church, what objection to their taking that knowledge as their starting-point? If they do not know it, why not postulate it, upon the testimony of those who do know, and wait until the proof of its correctness is gradually unfolded?

There may be danger in starting from another, a non-Christian point. In a certain Seminary not many years since, where the custom was to begin with the postulation of the principles of causation, a bright student, seeing this

point to be fundamental to the system, spent the first three months of his study of systematic divinity principally in an exhaustive study of the theory of Mill and similar writers, with their antagonists of the intuitional school. He saw finally with perfect clearness the failure of Mill to account for all the facts of consciousness, and decidedly and fully adopted the objective validity of the principle of causation. But what if he had come out otherwise? Is there any superior scientific spirit manifested in starting with an abstract principle which is much called in question, rather than with a concrete fact? And is it scientific, when you have so far assumed the reality of the Christian system as to determine to study it, to pretend to throw away what you actually know about it by the testimony of immediate internal consciousness, viz., that it is a power which can renew the heart, and go on ignoring this most fundamental fact, which forms the basis of daily prayer and praise and various service, till "the system" brings the student to it, perhaps in the last month of the study? If that be science, let us have none of it!

The asking of these questions is their sufficient answer. No living Christian ever did thus commit spiritual suicide for the sake of securing candor of approach, or ever had it in his power to banish from consciousness and exclude from the argument all his previous knowledge. If the system, professedly begins with open confession of the reality of the Christian life, it does only by profession what it always has done in fact. More correct as a scientific method, it has the great incidental advantage, that when it puts in the front, and consciously employs, the great ideas which we have just reviewed in our discussion, it cuts the tap-root of the rationalizing temper. And that is something of the first importance in this age of the world. The kingdoms of the world will become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ, when Christians go forth in the full consciousness of their

divine mission, and the preacher will never have this full consciousness, if as a student he has been encouraged, or even permitted, to ignore it.

I know that many an objection will arise in the reader's mind, if this presentation of the theme shall have awakened his interest. It is not necessary to pause at the present point even to name them. Let the reader pursue the theme. The answers will be heard in due time.

II. Again, the system must be constructed with the constant use of Christian experience as a source of doctrine.

Christian experience IS a source of Christian doctrine, and when systematic theology confessedly employs it, puts it alongside of other sources, and brings the various component parts of source and proof into close juxtaposition, it is performing its undeniable duty, which is to bring system into all the elements of the confused situation in which we find ourselves; for the Christian experience not only IS, and ever HAS BEEN, a source of Christian doctrine, but at the present time, under the name of "Christian consciousness" it has, often in the hands of unskilful manipulators, become a source of much hesitation and perplexity.

Professor Schnedermann of Leipzig, in an article in the *Neue Kirchliche Zeitschrift* for June, 1890, has brought out with special emphasis the fact that Christian experience IS, as above maintained, a source of Christian doctrine. He says: (1) Self-evident source is Revelation. (2) Proximate source, which can never be neglected without loss, is the consciousness of the believer. But (3) it is the consciousness of the believer as a member of the Christian church, the church of all times and places as it expresses itself in the hymns and confessions, in the history and literature of the church, in the forms of our modern church life, and, in essential agreement with all this, in the consciousness of the individual believer. (4) The highest appeal and ultimate source are the utterances of the apostles and prophets, and

above all of Jesus Christ as the original possessor and the mediator of communion with God.—Upon the basis of these distinctions, he goes on to say that it is his contention, “not that this consciousness ought to *become* a source of doctrine, but that it everywhere and always *has been, is, and, as long as Christians busy themselves with the subject, will be* a source. It is affirmed that Paul employed this consciousness as an important source of his utterances, and recognized it as such, that Luther employed it as a principal source of word and deed; and that nowhere has a man ever put forth a formulated expression of the Christian faith without employing his consciousness, for the simple reason that faith is according to its nature an operation of the human soul, and hence utterances which proceed from the other activities of that soul cannot fail to be modified by this special activity.”

Candid reflection upon the subject will, I believe, make it perfectly clear to every theologian that Schnedermann is right at this point. If reflection does not make it evident, since the consciousness is the personal possession of every Christian, it may be impossible to produce clear conviction by any argument. But an example may help the thinker somewhat. What is it which often gives so great clearness upon the elements of Christian doctrine to many an unlettered man in our congregations? The phenomenon is often remarked, and the explanation has often been given, as an argumentative defence for the Protestant doctrine of the Scriptures, that the word of God is so plain as to make its way to the believing heart without difficulty by simple frequent contact. But why is the phrase “believing heart” interpolated always in such an explanation? Is it not because of the consciousness that the *belief* is the channel through which this

merely because it is in the Scriptures, but because he has had illumination shed upon the page of Scripture by the light of his own experience of the method of divine operation. Thus the same Christian experience which gave us our Protestant faith,—for Luther experienced justification by faith before he ever formulated it,—has reproduced the same faith in multitudes of souls. Historically, the final and conclusive argument of Athanasius in his contest for the Nicene faith was the necessity of the doctrine of the deity of the Redeemer to satisfy the demands of the Christian experience. What held the Massachusetts churches to Trinitarianism in the days of the great controversy? Was it the exegesis of Moses Stuart? Every reader of the history knows it was the experience of the masses of the churches, the quickened life fanned into flame by revival winds, the heart, the consciousness of the churches. What is the great argument for the freedom of the will but consciousness? and what for the necessity of the operation of the Spirit in conversion, but that other, inseparable consciousness of powerlessness in our freedom?

Christian experience thus *is* a source of Christian doctrine, and the systematic divine who wishes to help the present day must give it its proper place with full purpose in his work. To quote the Fichteian phrase of Schnedermann: "*Man wird sich entschliessen müssen, das Aufgezeigte in ernste Erwägung zu ziehen.*"

But it is also a source possessing the highest evidential value. Some years ago the writer presented the argument from Christian experience for the inspiration of the Scriptures in the *Bibliotheca Sacra*.¹ The same line of argument, which had been elaborately wrought out by Professor Frank of Erlangen, has now been presented, upon the side of its relation to Christian evidences, in the Ely Lectures for 1890, by Professor Stearns of Bangor Seminary. This great work,

¹ Vol. xl. (1883), pp. 97-138.

which will mark an epoch in American theology, after discussing the general topic of Christian evidences at the present time, and laying down the philosophical presuppositions of any Christian doctrine, discusses the genesis of the evidence, its growth, its verification, and then answers the objections that may arise against the general and particular positions which have been taken. The chapter upon the genesis, and that upon the growth of the evidence, will be immediately recognized by every mature Christian as a faithful transcript of the common Christian experience. The chapter upon the verification of the evidence is the most important for the present discussion. In it Professor Stearns has shown how Christian experience transforms the probable knowledge of Christian truth which a man may have from any source, as testimony or philosophical reasoning, into real knowledge, as he terms it, or knowledge in which real contact with the objective verities of religion, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, is gained. He brings out the fact that the processes which go on in the soul of the believer when he experiences the new birth, are matters of fact, or immediate consciousness, and thus the most real of all facts, as real as our consciousness of any other modification of our existence, as that of any thought, or any emotion. He says: "There is a true sense in which we recognize the great change by the aid of the Bible. But there is a sense in which it is equally true that this experience is independent of the Bible. It passes over from probability [in which it is when we depend upon the Bible for it] into actuality and thus confirms the truth of the Bible. But no man could pass through it, whether he had the Bible or not, without knowing it for the change that it is. If it be true that any heathen are regenerated in this life [as the author hopes] they must have some knowledge of the fact, though they will of course describe it in different terms and explain it in different ways from the Christian." He proceeds to develop still farther how through

this consciousness, in which we become conscious of operations which are the operations of no finite source, and must be referred to God, we come into contact with God in a manner analogous to that in which we come into contact with the knowledge of the external material world. And he even extends this contact in Christian experience, as above said, to the conscious differentiation of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

It is precisely this evidential value which critics have been inclined to deny to Christian experience. They have declared it subjective, good possibly for him who has it, but of no use with others, who would be able to turn its whole force by the simple objection, It may seem so to you: to us it does not. But when it is shown, as Professor Stearns has succeeded in showing with perfect clearness, that this Christian experience is formally exactly like all other experience, the critic can no longer deny its validity on the ground of mere subjectivity. He cannot deny that there *MAY* be a Christian experience: he can only deny that there *IS*. And this is too preposterous a denial to be successfully made.

And this will result in an essential deepening of our theology. Our New England theology has not made the doctrine of the Trinity, for example, firmly as it has held to it, a practical doctrine filled with living power, except at the single point of the deity of Christ. In fact theologians have seemed to imply that the only point where the doctrine came in living contact with the Christian was here. But if there be a trinity of agencies, if we are sheltered under the hand of our heavenly Father, if we are sanctified by the indwelling Holy Spirit, if we are governed in the mediatorial kingdom by the ascended and glorified Christ, then it is but natural that due weight placed upon Christian experience will bring these truths out into greater prominence, and make the Trinity in our formulated propositions the basis of doctrine, as it is the basis of developed Christian life in actual fact; and the bet-

ter teaching at this point will undoubtedly result in the elevation of the experience to a higher plane. The same will be true at many other points. The present age stands between the two opposite dangers of Pantheism and Pelagianism, between the resolution of all forces into the necessary forces of nature, and the assertion of human freedom in reply in such a manner as to deny the grace of God. Which would be the worse, a world in which the God had become a force of nature, or one in which man had become so independent as to do without God at all? Now, if general human experience is against the reign of blind force in the realm of will, so Christian experience is against Pelagianism, and Pelagianizing tendencies. It has been said of the Methodists, who have cherished an evangelical Arminianism in the bosom of a practical experience of grace, that they might preach Arminianism, but they prayed Calvinism. The proper emphasizing of Christian experience by the systematic theologian, will do much to bring into every doctrine those counterbalancing elements which preserve right tendencies from falling into incorrect extremes.

The distinct recognition of Christian experience as a source of doctrine will also serve to bring forward out of their obscurity certain old elements of theology which have been long forgotten, but which are needed at the present day. This is particularly true of the *testimonium Spiritus Sancti* to the divine origin of the Bible. Calvin, as is well known, taught that the regenerated man was by the Spirit enabled to perceive that the Scripture is the word of God just as the man possessed of normal vision can see that white is white. The Westminster divines, following Calvin's lead in the main, made this witness the source of "our full persuasion and assurance" in respect to them, though reciting briefly the heads of other arguments, as Calvin had done.

This argument may be said to have disappeared from New England theology. Edwards dwelt upon it, and gave it its

due place; but his successors first slighted, and then ignored it. I do not myself remember to have heard it mentioned in the whole course of my theological education in America. And yet, it *is* in fact the argument upon which most Christians unconsciously rely for their proof of the Scriptures. Upon what does the unlearned man rely for his confidence in the Bible? Upon the proofs that Justin Martyr knew and employed the fourth Gospel? He never heard of them. And what in fact is the evidence which convinces even the scholar? Is it the disputed arguments which he has conned, often with a misgiving here and there? No! The faith he has is too certain a thing to have been produced by such a process. He knows the Bible is divine when he draws near to God through it. In fact, the great pieces of Christian experience, the new birth, justification by faith, the atonement appropriated and thus known, prove themselves to be divine by the "contact" (to use Professor Stearns' word) which the soul has in them with God. They are facts of consciousness, known immediately, and the book which contains them is God's book; and as it is further read, and more and more of its contents come into the experience of the reader, more and more this spiritual vision, which sees the truth by immediate intuition, beholds it all filled with the divine. And the final verdict is—what it has always been—This is the word of God.

Now, at the present time, there is need of this ancient argument. When Calvin forged it, he had in mind the Church of Rome. The papal party claimed, when the Protestants began to lay so much stress upon the Bible, that they got their Bible from the church, so that after all the church was the ultimate authority. No! said Calvin, the Bible rests upon no human authority, not even upon the church, it rests upon God. He could have proved that the claim of the church was wrong another way; but the exigencies of the times did not permit. So in our own day, a different force,

that of biblical criticism, is coming in upon us from every quarter and assailing our old-time, New England defences of the Bible. We might meet it another way; but the best way to gain peace enough in which to pursue our studies in the Bible, which studies will bring the further refutation of the attacks, is to recur to this high and lofty proof, and go our way. Let criticism now do her best! It will be found in the end that she will leave us, so far as the divine origin of the Bible is concerned, just where she found us, thoroughly convinced of it. Meantime we can have peace.

This will be found to be a very important matter. "*Man wird sich doch entschliessen müssen, das Aufgezeigte in ernste Erwägung zu ziehen!*" For his own part, the writer has little concern about the criticism. So far as it is an attack of rationalists upon religion, it will be found by any acute inquirer to rest upon the very simple postulate, that there is no such thing as the supernatural. A dogmatics in which Christian experience has its proper place, has nothing to fear from such a begging of the question, for every Christian student will soon see that he has in himself the scientific refutation of that heathen postulate. Had Robert Elsmere studied with Professor Stearns, he would never have left the church. But what may be called believing criticism is also going on, in which no attack upon the church is intended, but which now and then propounds results which seem to be inconsistent with the inspiration of the Scriptures. They seem so, they may not be so. We are to remember the contests over the interpretation of the word "day" in Genesis i., and the calmness with which we now contemplate what seemed subversive of all truth to many at first. The criticism is well meant, but is it sound, and are its results to be trusted? If so, what results? And what is to be done with inspiration? Such are the vital, and real questions which are thrust upon the student.

Now, in the conduct of any critical work, the mind must

be calm, and at ease from anxieties as to results. No man who loves the church ardently, can study critical problems fairly and come out with unprejudiced results, if he is under continual necessity of asking, for example, If it should prove that Moses did not write Genesis, what would become of the authority of Christ, who said he did? Let him leave all those questions. He knows that Christ is the Son of God: he has had experience of his saving power: the divinity of his mission and nature are upon the firm foundation of known truths: the Scriptures are perceived by him to shine with the light of the truth of God. This is so whether he can understand all possible historical problems or not. He need therefore have no anxiety; and he may be sure that, since all truth is one, proceeding from one God, whatever is necessary to the inspiration of the Scriptures in the way of historical fact, will be found to rest upon the firmest basis, when the criticism is done, and that criticism will only confirm old theories, or substitute in their place better ones.

Such calmness and objective certainty of the victory of the truth will save the student, save the criticism itself, and save the church; but a criticism done by a mind that is disturbed by its fears, or by one that is impartial because it is indifferent what the result may be, will be a menace to the church, and ruin to the man who performs it.

We are in a critical age. The "historic method" has the floor. We shall have well-meaning but unwise critics, and hostile but able ones. Unbelief of the historical character of our religion will fill the air, and our young men will come to the theological seminary in genuine difficulty and doubt. The clearing of the air by the removal of the main question to another sphere, while the critical discussion is carried on by itself, is—let it be repeated—a necessity of the situation! And systematic theology to-day must conquer the situation of to-day.

The systematic use of Christian experience as a source of doctrine will also make the study of theology more of a means of grace. Since it will make religion an independent sphere of its own in many respects, it will release it from its old-time dependence upon philosophical proofs, and this will directly tend to raise the respect of men for religion, and lead to its higher cultivation. When it is understood that a man may really be in true contact with the reigning Christ upon his mediatorial throne, meditation upon that glorified Lord will be a more common matter within theological halls; and so with every other element of experience. For when the validity of experience is ignored, even its practical importance tends to sink out of sight. Our seminaries have often been accused of being poor places for the cultivation of piety. Let the new systematic theology make it otherwise.

Here, then, it is time to suggest how the system, beginning with the postulate of a Christian church, as an institution of supernatural origin, and possessing the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, may go on to raise the walls of its foundation still farther. Among other supernatural facts in the church is this fact of the witness of the Spirit, whereby the church now and always from the beginning, independently of all historical proofs, has believed, nay seen, her Bible to be the word of God. This is then the supreme proof of the Scriptures. The systematic divine needs to bring in the ordinary historical arguments, as they have usually been conducted among us, and should show as nearly as possible the state of critical research as affecting the proof; but he should make it clear, that upon the postulate that there is a church in which the Spirit is at work, this testimony is a complete proof, and also that, when all proper force is ascribed to the other arguments, it is still the supreme argument, since it perfects all the rest by giving them that personal corroboration, without which they must remain a somewhat extraneous matter to the mind.

And, now, the theologian will be prepared for the execution of the next work that is to be done to bring our theology into contact with the times, viz.—

III. The system needs carefully to separate between the elements actually contributed to it by reason, and those derived from the word of God.

It may be stated without undue severity, that the methods employed in Natural Theology in our schools have interpreted nature in the light of revelation, and have then conveyed the impression that the results obtained were deducible from nature by right reason without the aid of the Bible. Not that this was intended, but that it was too often the actual result. The consequence was that there was little distinction made between what was due to revelation alone, and what was historically derived from the unaided reason, and the impression was left that Scripture only told man what he might equally well have learned, had he only had his eyes open to the world about him. The result was a depreciation of revealed theology, and a further intensification of that rationalistic spirit which the other methods of systemization had already produced. It is simply due to the churches, who expect their ministers to be men of the word, that this confusion should be most carefully avoided by the systematic theologian of the present day.

As an example of this false method, we may take the proofs of the existence of God as they have commonly been given among us. The argument begins with causation as an intuitive principle, proceeds to the argument from design, sometimes has introduced the so-called ontological and cosmological arguments, proves that the being thus derived is benevolent, or removes the objections urged against his benevolence, and then proves that this God has given us the Scriptures, which are therefore his word. But the proof involves self-deception. The elements derived from this proof, in fact, a world-builder, an independent being, a benev-

olent being. When the ontological argument is employed, if it is used in its best form, that of Lotze¹, it presents as real the being corresponding to our highest ideal. This will undoubtedly be the Christian's God, the infinite Father; but whence has that ideal come? From the Bible. As an historical fact, the Christian idea, which is often pretty well given in our standard proofs, is not to be found in any pre-Christian writer, nor anywhere, nor at any time, outside of the circles of Judaism and Christianity. Says Albrecht Ritschl, in the first edition of his "*Rechtfertigung und Ver-söhnung*," before the consequences of his system drove him to deny the validity of the position which he here presents,—"The proofs of the existence of God, as originally meant, presuppose that the reality of God is already determined by the religious feeling. This was expressly conceded when it was acknowledged that the purpose of the proofs was to show that in the real God, the origin and confirmation of man's conception of his own position in and over the world, is to be recognized also the highest law of the world. For theoretic knowledge . . . expects that the things, the mutual relations of which under law are the goal of its attempts, should be given as real. . . . When, on the other hand, one seeks to attain the existence of God first by scientific proof, . . . he follows the methods of a false idealism, which treats the laws of theoretical knowledge as the only ones valid."² And he adds: "This assumption of the idea of God [viz., the Christian idea derived from revelation,] is

Christianity presents."¹ In other words, the Christian idea of God serves as a key to unlock the mysteries which gather about the problems of the origin and government of the world, and, as affording thus a satisfactory solution, it is a scientific idea; but it is not originated by science. Ritschl's sharp criticism of the actual historical development of the proofs for the existence of God, need not be repeated here, but the theologian at the present day must carefully consider them."²

No! The idea of one spiritual, personal God, the Father, reigning upon the throne of the universe, actuated by love, even that love which seeks the lost, directing all things to his own glory, and that the glory which he reveals in Jesus Christ, who gave himself for sinners, is not a philosophical idea, or given by unaided human reason, however reasonable it may appear when once it is known. It will be for the glory of God, as well as for clearness in thought, to keep that fact clearly before the mind of the student of theology.

Improvement at this point is of course principally an improvement of method. To this fuller consideration may be given under the following head. But here it may be suggested that it is better to separate sharply between the Natural and the Revealed theology by putting them in distinct courses. Possibly the best Natural theology comes in the way of "Apologetics," where the effort is, having the Christian doctrines given, not to prove them by natural reason, but to show that they are defensible by reason, and that the objections urged against them are invalid. But we hasten on to say that,—

IV. The system should be constructed upon the induct-

tutes of Calvin. Zwingli may have had a dominating philosophic idea which brings his theology under the head of *a priori* systems, but Calvin most certainly not. New England theology has meant to keep close to the Bible, and to use the facts presented in Nature inductively, and whatever failure has attended it has been the failure of application of the method, or of misconception and employment of the facts perceived, rather than a conscious adoption of a strictly deductive method. Then, again, our systems have been dominated by the teacher's methods, and have assumed the synthesis to have been already performed, and conceived the task of the teacher to be that of analytical presentation. But a change has now come over the spirit of the world, and the old ideals, with some loss and much gain, have been swept aside for the introduction of the "seminary method," or the laboratory method, even in history and theology. Teachers must now work with their classes, and the method of the systematic teaching of theology must be, in a sense never required before, the inductive. The induction must be performed before the class, and the pupil must be carried through the processes by which truth is arrived at, not merely presented with a truth already discovered, which is proved with reference mainly to convincing him. The teacher must now be the workman, not the salesman; the judge, not the advocate; the companion, not the master; the guide into the truth, not the authority for it.

There is implied in these statements what ought possibly to be definitely stated, that systematic theology is not intended to accomplish the impossible thing of presenting all truth in absolute and uninterrupted concatenation, without break or failure of explanation. It is also not a system in which, if one position be given up, all must be surrendered. Such is often the conception had of it, but such has not been the New England conception, and such is not the modern conception, or the need of the present time. Geology does

not present such a system: nothing does in fact, but mathematics, and some systems of philosophy which have been spun out of the brains of the philosophers, the true nature of which has been shown by their ultimate entire collapse. Systematic theology will have done all that can be properly asked of her, when she shall have rightly stated all the facts, and brought them into such relations and under such explanations as the means at her disposal enable her to do. Did the mind of man possess the infinite powers of the divine mind, it might present a perfect system, without gap or break; but such is not the case.

The true inductive method of theological teaching will call for a new method of treating the whole derivation and proof of the various doctrines. The first task of the teachers will be the marshalling of the facts. Let him begin with the facts of Christian experience, since this is, in Schnedermann's phrase, the "proximate source." For example, if the topic be the existence of God, let the facts of Christian experience which bear upon this point be marshalled in that order which will at the same time exhibit their inner connection, and point directly at the result at which the teacher is to arrive,—the investigator being exercised in the discovery and statement of the facts, just as they are, and the man of logic and of analytic power in their marshalling. This can be done. Then let the work proceed, for example, to the Scripture facts bearing upon the doctrine under consideration. They need to be stated and marshalled also. Now, it is at this point, perhaps as much as anywhere, that the new method must depart from the old. The old method presented the formulated doctrine, and then cited certain texts as proof-texts: the new method takes up passages, or whole Epistles, and discusses them, unfolding the course of argument, bringing out the truth, and when passage after passage has been discussed, bringing the different passages into relation with one another, and obtaining their com-

bined verdict upon the point in question. This will take time, I admit, too much time those will say who still favor the former method.¹ But time enough must be taken to succeed; and the old method, so far as producing the effect of turning the minds of men to the Bible as a true authority, or giving the system the character of a true induction from Scripture, failed. Then let other facts, like those given by nature, or by philosophy, be discussed in their order, till all belonging at this point have been adduced.

When the induction has been thus performed, what form shall the induced doctrine take? The demands of the times require, I believe, a modification at this point. It has been common among us so to interweave the particular theory of a doctrine with the doctrine itself as to state both doctrine and theory in the same formulation. I would venture to suggest the separation of the two. For example, the doctrine of the atonement can be so stated that every essential fact of doctrine held by New School and by Old School men can be included, and yet the distinguishing theories of the two schools omitted. I may illustrate my meaning by the following form, which does not pretend to be exhaustive, but is sufficiently so for the purposes of illustration. "The atonement consists in the sufferings and death of Christ which are substituted for the eternal punishment of the sinner and constitute a perfect equivalent for the same by satisfying the claims of the divine person and law upon the sinner." Whether the claims of the divine person and law consist in the necessity of a satisfaction to distributive justice or to the necessities of the governmental system, is not defined and

This might be bad for the denominational spirit, but it would be good for the churchly spirit. If dogmatics were written upon this plan, it would be found that most of the "doctrines" taught in the different evangelical denominations were the same; and this would greatly promote the perception of our actual Christian unity, and contribute essentially to the intensification of the feeling of Christian unity,—a *desideratum* at the present time.¹ But (2) it also contributes a very great argument to the apologetic work of the professor of 'theology and the preacher, in that it makes evident that the Christian system, so essentially one in the different denominations, has the common consent of a very much larger number than one limited denomination.

The "doctrine" having been stated, the "theory" can follow in a special head. Here comes all the work of the systematic divine in exhibiting relations, and introducing the systematic element into the theological conceptions of his pupils. This is highly important, and must never be neglected. But evidently it is the sphere of the individual or denominational element in the whole structure, and has not that importance or general validity which attaches to the preceding head. The separation makes this manifest, and contributes to clearness of thought on the part of the learner.

The "proof" has, of course, already been given in the induction, and possibly on its rational side in the "theoretical explication." But the answer of objections and the discussion of various subordinate topics may be now appended at the pleasure of the professor. The main ends will, however, have been already secured.

The Germans have long had their "Theological Ethics," which once formed a constitutive part of the standard Calvinistic systems, as well as of the Westminster Confession; but we have of late had chiefly what I think deserve the title of Heathen Ethics. Certainly what elements of Christianity have been introduced have been generally introduced without acknowledging their divine source in the Bible, and many distortions have resulted. But the Bible consists largely in applied ethics, and certainly on such topics as the family, divorce, the relations of master and men, etc., for which our times are demanding the introduction of the principle of Christian love, the biblical ethics would have had a strong tendency to make men more considerate than they have been. The system of Theological Ethics would help decidedly in introducing Christianity into the practical affairs of life. "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," is more effective than the "love to being" which even the best ethical systems have formulated and enforced.