

ARTICLE VI.

THE APPEAL TO REASON.

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THE mind has no especial faculty for the discovery of the truths of religion or for the solving of the problems of religion. These problems, like all others, make their appeal to the reason. There is no other tribunal to which they can appeal. If it be said that in matters of religion the appeal is to faith, it must be remembered that faith is reason exercising itself upon one class of cases, and that its functions are still performed in accordance with all the laws of reason. A court of chancery is occupied with a special class of cases, but in administering its affairs it violates neither the common law nor the principles of justice. A court of chancery is not established to adjudicate cases for which there is a plain, adequate, and complete remedy in a court of law. But there are cases to which the common law is not applicable. The common law cannot punish a man for a wrong that he has not committed, but a court of equity can enjoin him from committing it, and so prevent the wrong. A court of law and a court of equity exist for the same purpose,—for the administering of justice. When a judge of a law court sits in a court of equity he does not cease to be a minister of justice. Equity is an exchange of justice for that which is another kind of justice, but the foundation of both law and equity is human right and human duty. Faith is an exchange of belief for that which is another kind of belief, but the foundation of all belief is the assent of the reason. In its last analysis the faith that saves is found to be human assent to the testi-

mony of Christ concerning human sin and divine righteousness. A rational conviction of the sin of man and of the righteousness of God is faith of the purest type. Religion is brought into contempt when a man says that he believes in the atonement, but that he has not the least idea what the atonement is.

All true religion appeals to the reason. As long as men had a reasonable knowledge of God they did not consult the oracles. Personal conviction is the true *urim* and *thummim*. Abraham and Moses knew God better than the priests did. God is known as any other mind is known. By reason of self-consciousness one knows that his own actions are the offspring of his own mental volitions. When he sees similar actions performing around him, he refers them to a mind like himself; if it is possible to refer them to a human mind no power could hinder him from doing so. When he is conscious of things that cannot be referred to a human mind, but that do bear the marks of mental volition, he refers them to a superhuman mind which the religious consciousness of the world calls God. Science is the systematizing of things; philosophy is the explaining of things. A scientist may be expected to say that he is ignorant of the cause of things; a philosopher never says so. Philosophy is concerned with the search for the cause of things. Religion begins where philosophy leaves off; it begins with a reasonable knowledge of God. The reason is the foundation of all belief,—of religious belief no less than of mathematical belief. The mathematician gives rational assent to propositions whose proof rests upon axioms that are the inductions of the common human experience, and not at all of his own individual research. Not every one who accepts the Christian faith is himself conscious of the processes of the human reason upon the results of which his faith rests. Not only is he not conscious of such processes, they may not even be the pro-

cesses of his own individual reason. The intellectual strata of generations may furnish the unseen foundations of his belief; but unless he uses the word belief to signify the assent of the reason to the inferences that arise by rational processes from trustworthy data, he uses the word in some peculiar and private way of his own.

It is sometimes supposed that if a thing is inconceivable it is therefore untrue. This is to confound the reason with the imagination. Self-consistency is a test of truth; conceivability is not. A proposition that violates any of the principles of the human reason cannot become an object of belief; but it is not so with a proposition that eludes the imagination. The dogmas of mathematics that nothing divided by nothing produces an infinity of something, and that a minus quantity is a real thing whose cube root can be taken, are rational and well-established propositions. The proving of them is in harmony with the laws of the reason, and the propositions themselves are vitally involved in the solutions of problems that are absolutely established and beyond all questioning. But while these propositions are rational, they do not appeal to the imagination; or, in common speech, they are inconceivable. The scientific dogma that the smallest particle of matter can be divided again and again an infinite number of times, and yet there will still be a particle of matter upon which the same process may be infinitely repeated, appeals to the reason, but not to the imagination. The proposition is rational and it is true, but the thing itself is inconceivable; it cannot be brought before the imagination. The imagination begins by attempting to picture the smallest possible particle of matter, and then immediately it must conceive this smallest possible thing made still smaller. No sound mind can imagine it and no sound mind can deny it. The dogma of religion that God is a person, but that he is everywhere present, belongs to the same category of propositions. It

does not lend itself to the human imagination, but it does not violate the human reason. The Christian doctrine of the Trinity of the Father, Son, and Spirit eludes the imagination, but it does not violate the reason. This doctrine is that there are three manifestations or specialized activities of Deity. The first is his self-manifestation in his general relation to the universe and to man, in which he is a Father, in the real sense of the word. The second is his self-manifestation in the person and work of Christ. The third is his self-manifestation within the human soul for the accomplishment of those purposes of his toward men which are revealed in Christ. This doctrine does not appeal to the imagination, but it does not violate the reason. Physical science in appealing to the reason, formulates its dogmas in the same fashion. The chemical combination H_2O appears under three specialized manifestations, each having mechanical qualities that are foreign to the other two. When this chemical combination appears as a gas it is called steam; when it appears as a liquid it is called water; when it appears as a crystal it is called ice. Each of these is distinguished from the others by well-marked qualities that do not permit them to be confounded with each other, and each one is absolutely H_2O ; in the phrase of the Nicene theology, it is very H_2O of very H_2O . If a physicist be asked if steam is really H_2O , he will answer yes. If he be asked if H_2O is steam, he will answer that it is not necessarily steam. If he be asked if steam is the same as H_2O , he will answer, if he is wise, that it depends on what is meant by the word same. If a theologian be asked if Christ is really God, he will answer yes. If he be asked if God is really Christ, he will answer that it is not necessarily so. If he be asked if Christ is the same as God, he will answer, if he is wise, that it depends on what is meant by the word same. These propositions do not appeal to the imagination. It is impossible to form a

mental picture of H_2O apart from these manifestations of it. If it be asked whether it does exist apart from these three forms, or is capable of exhibiting any qualities other than those exhibited in these three manifestations, the answer is that there is no evidence that leads to such inference. These are the results of research in the laboratory. They are rational and they are unquestioned, but they do not easily lend themselves to the imagination.

This illustration of the common inconceivability of some dogmas of natural science and of religion is not intended to cast any light whatever upon the doctrine of the Trinity as a doctrine. This parallel attempts neither to prove nor to illustrate the doctrine of the Trinity. It is not claimed that there is here any analogy whatever. But it is claimed that there is not only similarity, but identity of method in establishing the foundations of theological and of scientific belief; that in both the appeal is to the human judgment exercising itself upon the evidence, and not to the imagination.

The identity of the theological method and the method of research employed in other sciences appears again in the fact, that, while the reason is the foundation of belief, yet there are elements of belief which, though they have a rational foundation, and though they do not especially elude the imagination, yet they do not easily lend themselves to expression in terms of the known. It must be remembered that the mathematical symbols used to express infinity and variation, and the plus and minus signs used after a number, all signify that the numerical expression does not exactly represent the thing or the quantity for which the numerical expression stands. The circumference of a circle bears a definite and unvarying relation to the diameter, yet the circumference cannot be exactly expressed in terms of the diameter. The fraction one-fourth can be exactly expressed as a decimal; the fraction one-third cannot. The

mathematical method of notation that exactly expresses one fraction will not exactly express all fractions. Yet the reality of mathematical ideas and the truth of mathematical expressions are not impeached by the inflexibility of mathematical notation. In theological belief the doctrines of the Person of Christ and of the Triunity are none the less rational because they do not readily lend themselves to propositional statement.

Since the reason is the foundation of belief, there follows the corollary that belief must be subject to modification or even to reconstruction if new evidence or a better apprehension of old evidence shall give rise to modified inferences or to new ones. Even the most familiar expressions of the facts of the universe have only as much certainty as is involved in the data on which they rest. It may well be believed that white is always and everywhere white, and that black is always and everywhere black; that the terms white and black are the accurate expressions of certain and unvarying things. And yet this may not be exactly true. White is the reflection of all the rays of light that come to us from the sun. But there may be some rays of the sun's light that never reach the earth, but are absorbed by the ether or by the atmosphere, as red glass absorbs all but the red rays; and by and by there may be a change in the ether or in the atmosphere that will permit these unknown rays to reach the earth. It is evident that white light, the reflection of all the solar rays that reach the earth, would then be something different from what white light now is, though it would doubtless be called by the same name. Or, if the composition of the sun should change so that one of the colors of the spectrum should no longer be produced, the reflection of the rest of the rays would doubtless still be called white light, but it is evident that white to that generation would be something different from what it is to this. The same possible un-

certainty exists in the case of black, which theoretically is the absorption of all light and the absence of all color. But no one has ever seen a thing that is really black. The most perfect black known reflects thirty per cent of light. If by and by a substance shall be found that will absorb all light, it is certain that black will then be something different from what black now is. Yet this qualified certainty in no sense discredits the statement that rational inference arising from well-established evidence is the foundation of all belief, whether mathematical, scientific, or theological.

In the appeal to reason religion is in precise harmony with the method of mathematics, of history and of the physical sciences. All mental inference proceeds from known principles to newly discovered facts, or from known facts to newly discovered principles. Deductive and inductive inference are the universal methods of rational research. Deductive inference is grounded on principles, and its characteristic feature is the perception of identity. When a prosecuting attorney shows how any murderer must have acted, and then shows that the accused man acted in accordance with the principles that govern the actions of a guilty man, he has shown that the conduct of the prisoner is identical with that of a guilty man; and since the sum of a man's actions is the correct expression of the moral condition of the man, a jury would make the deductive inference that the man is guilty. By a synthetic process of inference the mind of the jury has gone out from the principles of guilty action to the facts of the man's conduct, and has identified his conduct as that of a guilty man.

Inductive inference is grounded on facts, and its characteristic feature is the perception of similarity. When a prosecuting attorney shows, not how a murderer must have acted, but how the accused man did act, and that his separate actions were similar to the actions of men who are murderers, and that his actions constitute a group of

actions that can be referred only to the general class of murderous actions, he has shown that the accused man belongs to a class of men called murderers. His analysis of the man's actions with a view to the classification of the man is the botanist's method of analyzing the elements of a flower with a view to the classification of the flower. By an analytic process of inference the mind of the jury has gone from the facts of the case to the principles of guilt.

Analysis and synthesis are not two methods of inference; they are two correlated processes of one method. Induction is the process of making inference from a group of similar individual things to the principles that characterize the general class to which the individuals belong. Deduction is the process of making inference from a general principle to the particular cases that fall under that principle. In his "Wörterbuch der Philosophischen Grundbegriffe," Kirchner says, "Die analytische Methode geht von den Bedingungen aus, um die Prinzipien aufzusuchen, von denen das Gegebene abhängt, während die synthetische von den Prinzipien ausgeht,"—The analytical method proceeds from established data to discover the principles on which a given fact depends, while the synthetic method starts from the principles.

Theology is not the art of exegesis; it is an inductive science, taking account not only of the data furnished by the Sacred Scriptures, but also of the facts of physical nature, of history, of moral and of social and of psychic life. Among these data theological research is conducted according to the methods of research employed by all other sciences. There is no other available method. If mysticism has a private mode of apprehending the truth, the normal man is not jealous of that mode, but he refuses to confound mysticism with rational research. Doubtless there is divine guidance for reverent inquiry; but a human mind divinely guided does not cease to be a human mind. The

most reverent attitude of a mind which expects such divine guidance is to expect that the guidance will be in harmony with rational methods of human research. Nothing could be less reverent than to suppose that God, who is a spirit, could be pleased with a spirit that did violence to itself. A divinely guided mind should more perfectly perform the natural functions of the mind. No mind has a right to submit to a violation of any of its natural processes. To assent to a self-contradictory proposition is an immoral and wicked thing, no matter who makes the proposition. There is no self-contradictory proposition in the Scriptures, but if there were the mind would immediately reject it as untrue. In reading the Scriptures the mind is alert for the testing of every statement. It may be that one is not always conscious of this alertness of the mind, as he is not always conscious that he is immediately ready to close the eye against a foreign body. But even though one might wish it were not so, even though he might wish it were possible to read the Scriptures without any tendency to question them, it cannot be. God will not allow the mind thus to cheat itself of the joy of real conviction.

There is no religion which, if it were untrue, could so easily be refuted as the Christian religion. It involves every field of human research; it is vitally connected with all the results of human inquiry, historical, physical, social, and intellectual, and almost every known principle or law of the universe is relevant to some of the issues raised by it. It is not so with other religions, or with philosophies that approach to the nature and office of religion. They are concerned only with the rational and moral nature of man, and are susceptible of refutation only from those points of approach. Buddhism, for example, is not in any way affected by the results of modern historic research, and the facts of physical science are not relevant to the question of the truth or falseness of that religion.

But this touching upon all the fields of research, which would be the weakness of a false religion, is the strength of a religion that is true. Every relevant fact is relevant either to refute or to substantiate the issue to which it is relevant. Evidence, like an arrow, either wounds the enemy, or becomes his own weapon.

It is entirely true that Christianity has a valid appeal to the Christian consciousness, and that the testimony of the Christian consciousness to certain truths of religion is both relevant and credible. But in making the appeal to Christian consciousness it is not uncommon to overlook two facts. The first is that the Christian consciousness is competent to testify only upon a certain clearly defined class of subjects. The Christian consciousness can testify to truths and principles within itself, but not to facts and events outside itself. When the Scriptures reveal to man the high destiny for which he was created, or the hateful-ness of sin, in a way in which he has never before seen them, the Christian consciousness offers valuable and trustworthy corroborative testimony to the truths thus revealed. This is what Coleridge meant when he said that the Bible "found him." But by far the greater part of Christian doctrine can receive no testimony from the Christian consciousness, because by their nature the truths which these doctrines set out cannot be elements of one's own consciousness. For instance, the Christian consciousness can offer no testimony upon the subject of inspiration. Inspiration is concerned with the method by which some other person has received the truth. The inspiration of Paul was something in Paul's consciousness, and is in no way related to the consciousness of any other man. One cannot himself be conscious of what took place in the mind of another man. When Paul indicts us as miserable sinners, the Christian consciousness may recognize the truth of what he says and we may plead guilty to the indictment.

But when he adds that he knows these things by the inspiration of God, that process is something which lies entirely within the consciousness of Paul himself and entirely without the consciousness of every one else. The evidence of the Christian consciousness is valid for the testing of certain truths, but not for the testing of the mental processes by which some other men learned those truths. The Christian consciousness may be trusted concerning the things that are really original experiences within consciousness. But the inspiration of one man cannot become an element of the consciousness of another man. There is only a small part, though a profoundly important part, of the Apostles' Creed to which the Christian consciousness can offer testimony. If the Christian consciousness can testify to the existence of God the Father Almighty, it cannot testify to the fact that he is Maker of heaven and earth. If it can testify to the existence of Jesus Christ our Lord, it cannot testify to the fact that he is God's only Son; nor to the facts that he was conceived of the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; nor that he descended into hell and the third day rose again from the dead; nor that he ascended into heaven and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; nor that from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. The Christian consciousness cannot testify to these things, because these things are not known by the intuitions of consciousness. Nor can it offer evidence upon the Person of Christ, nor upon the mode of the Triune existence of Deity, nor upon the will of God with reference to future things. One may be aware of these things, but he cannot be conscious of them. They lie wholly without consciousness and are presented to the mind only through the usual channels of knowledge.

But the claim for Christian consciousness is sometimes

made much broader than this. It is sometimes claimed that since the Christian consciousness assures us of the truth of certain doctrines of the Christian religion, it gives us confidence to accept the doctrines as a whole; or specifically, since the Christian consciousness recognizes the truth of what Paul says concerning sin and righteousness, we may *for that reason* believe what he says on other subjects. But such a claim cannot be defended. When a witness is found to be competent to testify on one subject, it does not therefore follow that he is competent to testify on all subjects. A witness may be entirely competent to testify to the value of real estate, but entirely incompetent to testify to the identity of signatures. When one finds that the Scriptures clearly or wholly reveal what was indistinctly or partly in consciousness before, he may then on other subjects *of the same class* trust the Scriptures with entire reason even when they traverse what he had supposed was in Christian consciousness. But if the testimony of a writer of Scripture is to be accepted throughout and on all subjects, it must be either because what he says is susceptible of inductive proof, or because his claim to divine inspiration is already proved. And such trustworthiness can be assured only by the appeal to reason.

The second fact that is sometimes overlooked is that the appeal to the Christian consciousness is itself an appeal to reason. Knowledge is the mind taking account of what lies outside itself; consciousness is the mind taking account of itself and what lies within itself. The appeal to reason is the appeal to the mental faculties as a whole. The mind taking account of a First Cause is an act of inductive inference; the mind taking account of its own moral condition is an act of consciousness; and both are processes of reason. What is usually meant by the content of Christian consciousness is really a very elaborately

reasoned thing. The consciousness of sin, for example, involves the mental discrimination between right and wrong; it involves a knowledge of self as a responsible cause; it involves the recollection of the circumstances under which the act of sin was committed, the elements of the temptation to sin, the opposing inducements to righteousness, and the intentional choice to do wrong; it implies a reasoned knowledge of the consequences of sin, of the persons injured by it, the violence to one's own nature, and the offense to God; it involves the work of the reproductive imagination in recalling the entire event to the contemplation of the reason, and in setting out what should have been and what might have been, in contrast with what has been. If moral regeneration and personal salvation be regarded as a part of the content of Christian consciousness, an analysis of what these events really are will make it evident that the consciousness of them involves a still more elaborate process of reason than is involved in the consciousness of sin; for, added to that would be the reasons for believing that the consequences of a human action can be counteracted and the havoc of sin be repaired. Amiel is a mystic, but it is not mysticism when he says, "The understanding of the Christian consciousness is an integral part of philosophy, as the Christian consciousness is a leading form of religious consciousness, and religious consciousness is an essential form of consciousness."

The method of the science of theology is the same as the method of other sciences; its method is the appeal to reason. The propositions of religion are the inferences which arise by rational processes from trustworthy data. The questions at issue, the burden of proof, the relevance of evidence, the credibility of witnesses and the probative value of facts are to be determined in theology as in the science of history or in the science of biology. The great

mass of these data is contained in the Sacred Scriptures. To those Scriptures the mind may give unqualified confidence. But before they can receive such confidence their moral supremacy and their divine authority must be proved, like the law of gravitation or the parallax of a star.