

I close my paper with the stirring words of Dr. Frank Hugh Foster in his admirable *History of New England Theology*: "The questions of the present hour are more fundamental than those with which New England theology or its immediate successors have had to concern themselves. A ringing call is sounding through the air to face the true issue—the reality of God's supernatural interference in the history of man versus the reign of unmodified law (or ideas and processes). The question is not whether the old evangelical scheme needs some adjustments to adapt it to our present knowledge, but whether its most fundamental conception, the very idea of the Gospel, is true. Before this all the half-way compromises of the present day must be given up. Men must take sides. They must be for the Gospel or against it."

One word more, I began with an appeal to History and I will end with another: Look back across the intervening centuries since Christ came; note the crises, mark the difficulties, consider the oppositions; and yet, in spite of all, He triumphed, and His cause progressed. To-day the fairest flowers of modern civilization spring from the root of His cross. All that is sweet and true and of good report we owe to Him. We believe that we hold God's truth, that God is working in us and for us; therefore we need fear no foe, blanch before no difficulty, falter before no opposition. "He that is with us is greater than all that is against us." It is ours to guard the sacred deposit of truth revealed to us. It is ours to hand it on unimpaired and undiminished. May I be pardoned for altering slightly some well-known words—

Naught shall make us rue
If only we to Christ Himself do rest but true.

It is my belief that Evangelicalism may calmly, confidently and boldly face the modern world with all its problems—in Christ—with Christ—for Christ.

THE AUTHORITY OF HOLY SCRIPTURE.

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THE authority of Scripture is not undermined by the higher critics, but rather by those who believe that higher criticism has undermined its authority. To start on the assumption that criticism undermines Biblical authority is weakening the cause of religion. Matters of opinion are not matters of faith; and a sharp dividing line should be drawn between them. Argument must be met by argument, criticism by criticism. The criticism of the Bible has never been so trenchant as it is to-day; yet the authority of the Bible has never been more fully established amongst scholars in face of it and by the aid of it. "A Christian who knows that God

does speak to the soul through the Scriptures," says an Evangelical theologian, "ought not to speak of criticism as an alien or hostile power with which he may be compelled, against his will, to go so far, but which he must ever regard with suspicion." Our difficulties lie in the crude misrepresentations from the pulpit and the platform of those who, through lack of training and knowledge, consider all criticism as destructive, and in their fulminations against it do much harm to the cause of truth, and put into the hands of secularists and unbelievers a weapon which is used for their own castigation. Insistence on the destructiveness of higher criticism has led the man in the street, and many out of it, to ignore the fact that higher criticism means merely a criticism which is different in kind from lower or textual criticism, and that therefore every intelligent student must of necessity be a higher critic. It is due to sane criticism that the Bible is more vividly apprehended on its historical side, that the messages of the prophets become more real to us, that the figure of Jesus Christ shines forth more conspicuously, and that we apprehend the meaning of the inspired utterance that "in many parts and in many manners God having spoken of old time to the fathers in the prophets, at the end of these days spake to us in his Son." The wise preacher *uses* all these things in enforcing the claims of the Gospel message; though, if he be wise, he *says* but little of criticism owing to the common misinterpretation of the phrase "higher criticism" as destructive criticism. "Since 1889 (the appearance of *Lux Mundi*)," says the author of that delightful book, *John Allen and His Friends*, "the clergy have preached too often on higher criticism; and whilst most of their intelligent congregations are too ignorant of the Scriptures to know or care how many Isaiahs there are likely to have been, the youths and maidens among them leave their Sunday morning orisons, complacently assured that you need not believe what is in the Bible." Believe me, it is better for preachers to preach the great certainties of the Gospel than the great uncertainties of much current criticism. Not that I would deprecate criticism in the least—for the more criticized the firmer the Bible stands through its own inherent truth—but I think its intrusion into the pulpit a mistake, and am glad to say so in a gathering like this. The pulpit should be the platform of the herald, not the chair of the critic.

The authority of the Scriptures rests on that which destructive criticism cannot touch, and on what constructive criticism has greatly aided and enforced: it rests on the fact that they testify of Christ, the ultimate authority in religion and morals, the citadel of our faith. This states in a sentence the ground on which we accept them as authoritative; and a thesis on the authority of the Bible would be merely to amplify this sentence, bringing in sundry subordinate proofs and noticing the difficulties which occur in defending such a view.

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Our Church lays stress in its Articles, Homilies, and Ordination Services on the authority of the Scriptures. In the Articles refer-

ences to their sufficiency for salvation, their warranty of the Creeds, their limitation of Church authority, make clear the nature of their authority. It is not insignificant that the Book of Homilies should *open* with a discourse on Holy Scripture, and with these words: "Unto a Christian man there can be nothing either more necessary or profitable than the Knowledge of Holy Scripture; forasmuch as in it is contained God's true word, setting forth His glory, and also man's duty: and there is no truth nor doctrine necessary for our justification and everlasting salvation, but that is or may be drawn out of that fountain and well of truth." In the Ordinal the characteristic symbol is the delivery of the Bible, showing the fundamental contrast between this service and the Roman use. But although authority for the Church of England resides, as these references abundantly show, in the Scriptures, yet that authority is rested on canonicity—"in the name of Holy Scripture we do understand those canonical books of the Old and New Testament of whose authority there was never any doubt in the Church"—a somewhat curious statement in view of many of the Reformed Confessions and the well-known opinions of the Continental Reformers; and a somewhat difficult passage to interpret, for if we took the words literally we should have to omit from the lists given two or three Old Testament books, and five or six of the New Testament, about whose authority there were doubts in the Church. But it may be that, in view of what is said in the Homilies, the compilers of the Articles did not mean to assert authority solely on the question of canonicity—at least I hope not, for I think it the least satisfactory of the considerations which support the authority of Scripture. Yet it is a support; for the Providence which has watched over the preservation and the selection of the books was something far greater than the work of Councils, which only ratified the judgment of the common Christian body. In the formation of the Canon we read the action of the Holy Spirit in selecting for His Church books containing the authoritative messages of God. But this line of argument I do not propose to pursue, both on account of lack of time and also because of its complexity. Moreover, I believe that, owing to the greater attention paid now to the religious content of the Bible and its purpose rather than to the history of its transmission, we can arrive on other grounds at a more satisfactory argument for its authority. My thesis is this:

1. The New Testament is authoritative from its containing a consistent scheme of doctrine, and from its documents being primitive documents or derived from primitive sources.
2. The Old Testament is authoritative owing to its acceptance as such by our Lord and the writers of the New Testament.
3. The whole Bible is authoritative by reason of the work it has accomplished and still accomplishes.

I

The authority of the New Testament cannot be separated from a careful study of its contents and an effort to reach and grasp the

great truths therein recorded, and this is true of Holy Scripture generally. The authority of the New Testament rests on the spiritual emphasis of its doctrinal contents and their harmonious relationship to each other. Moreover, if we can prove that the documents of the New Testament are authentic documents written close to the events they commemorate, we have additional witness to their authority. The science of systematic theology enforces the one, literary or higher criticism the other.

The best method is to start from the Pauline Epistles—especially with that to the Romans, which gives us an exposition of the Gospel, and which is in Tyndale's words "the light and way unto the whole Scripture"—then to work back to the Gospels.

Notwithstanding the various types of doctrinal teaching, Pauline, Petrine, Johannine, and so on, there is a unity in diversity, and this is shown in the fundamental basis, the doctrine of redemption, that God forgives the sins of penitent and believing men because Christ died for them. This is elaborated by St. Paul in the great passage in the third chapter of Romans: "Now apart from the law a righteousness of God hath been manifested . . . a righteousness of faith in Jesus Christ unto all them that believe . . . being justified freely by his grace through the *redemption* that is in Christ Jesus . . . that God himself might be just and the justifier of him that hath faith in Jesus." Any attempt to describe this doctrine as merely Paulinism fails. It is prominent in St. John, in St. Peter, and in the Epistle to the Hebrews, as a study of the marginal references will show, and there is no need for me to elaborate it. And so, too, with the other great doctrines developed by St. Paul which relate to the new life in Christ.

Whence, but from heaven, could men, unskill'd in arts,
 In several ages born, in several parts,
 Weave such agreeing truths? or how, or why
 Should all conspire to cheat us with a lie?
 Unask'd their pains, ungrateful their advice,
 Starving their gain, and martyrdom their price.

The mystery of the Cross satisfies them all; and as an interpretation of the person and work of their Master their witness carries with it the authority of the Gospel narratives, the pivot of which is, "The Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost, . . . not to be ministered to, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many."

"If the content of Scripture be truly expounded," says Prof. Patterson, "it will continue as before to take captive the mind and hearts of men; and when this occurs there never fails the reproduction of its due reverence for the Bible as the book which enshrines and transmits the gracious and life-giving message, and it continues to be fitly described, in contrast to all other books, as the Word of God." The sufficiency of the New Testament in setting forth the doctrines of redemption implies its authority. An examination of the contents of the apostolic writings shows that they are faithful to the lines laid down by their Master, and interpret truly His Person

and His Work. It is the soteriological content of the New Testament which is the peculiar Word of God there, and which abides independent of all literary and historical criticism, which has to do only with the human side of the Scriptures. "The central point of all our interpretation," said a Lambeth Conference, "must be our Lord Jesus Christ as the sacrifice for our sins, the healer of our sinfulness, the source of all our spiritual life, and the revelation to our consciences of the law and motive of all moral virtue. To Him and to His work all the teachings of the Old Testament converge, and from Him all the teachings of the New Testament flow in spirit, in force, and in form." If this be true, and it is, then the New Testament is authoritative, for there can be no proof of its authority independent of its contents.

Dr. Ladd, in his monumental work on the Doctrine of Sacred Scripture, divides the content of the N.T. into (1) the obviously indispensable—the fundamental element of the Christian faith; (2) the apparently unimportant—what has no manifest bearing on that element; and (3) the important, but not obviously indispensable—the relation of which to the principles of faith is debatable. I observe the same tendency in recent works on the authority of Scripture—a tendency which evacuates much of the authority of Scripture as a whole, giving authority only to those truths which may be summed up in the expression "the Gospel"; and in opposition to it I should like to make the following observations: Each part of Holy Scripture has its peculiar work to do; and it is not for us to define its work, but to leave it to Him Who inspired the whole. The genealogies in the Gospels would certainly come under Dr. Ladd's "apparently unimportant," but they led Rabinowicz, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to come out of Judaism into Christianity; and many a minister could tell of the "apparently unimportant" contents of Scripture which have proved the stepping-stone to a knowledge of the Gospel. Again, even should Dr. Ladd's second and third classes be not the result of revelation or inspiration, yet authority should be ascribed to them *because they occur in the documents*. We have to deal with two questions—the authority of the writings themselves, and the authority of the doctrines they teach. It is not merely a question of the relative authority of the various parts of Scripture—a different question altogether to the one I am dealing with, and which would require special treatment. The tendency of the day is to emphasize that the Bible *contains* the Word of God, rather than that it is the Word of God, and Dr. Ladd would emphasize the Bible within the Bible as the only obviously indispensable. But I believe my old teacher Robertson Smith is right when he says: "This is not the doctrine of our Churches, which hold that the substance of *all* Scripture is God's Word."

Literary criticism has greatly enforced the authority of the New Testament. Time fails to point this out in any fullness; for the Pauline epistles reference need only be made to the works of Knowling, Beet, and more recent commentators. St. Paul's conversion

occurred within three or four years of our Lord's death, and there is probability that he had seen and heard Him, and as the rationalist Keim says, "His knowledge did not consist in a blind traffic in unexamined Christian tradition, but was obtained by a clear, keen, searching and questioning consideration, collection and collation of such materials as were accessible to him."

A word as to the Gospels. Recent research into their origin has strengthened considerably their authority. Early dates of the New Testament writings are authoritative witnesses to the teachings of Christ and to the historical facts of His life; and in the case of the Gospels the investigation of their sources puts their authority objectively on indisputable ground. That these are documentary may be taken for granted, for the theory of an oral origin does not satisfy the facts; and the sources of course carry us farther back in date than the Gospels themselves. Mark's Gospel—not our canonical Mark, but a proto- or deutero-Mark—is the foundation of Matthew and Luke; and this fact alone is evidence of the high authority accorded to it in the first century. Matthew and Luke appear to have drawn upon collections of sayings of our Lord; and the statement of Papias, the use elsewhere in the New Testament of the Lord's sayings not in our Gospels, the discovery of logia at Oxyrhynchus, show that such collections were much in use in the early Church. The exact limits of the contents of the hypothetical document known as "Q" are still matter for investigation; but whatever the ultimate conclusions of scholars the results will not affect my argument. Luke tells us that he was in a position to verify his documentary sources through eye-witnesses of the events; and recent criticism points to one of his special sources as the work of Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward, bound by ties of special gratitude towards her Lord and who ministered to Him of her substance. "Analysis of the sources," says a worker in the field, "so far from weakening the authority of the Gospel, has rather increased it, by enabling us to see the circumstances in which each component part came into being, and thus to account for differences in the record. Out of all these many and varied fragments there comes into view the single and commanding Personality of the Son of Man."

Recent criticism has shown that the Fourth Gospel, whether its authorship be assigned to the Apostle or to one of his disciples, is an historical document of first importance, giving us an authoritative first-century impression of the Person of our Lord, and is no Alexandrine production of the second century.

So much for my first argument from the harmonious doctrinal content of the New Testament and its high historical authority as a primitive document. To pass on to my second argument.

II

To Christ and the New Testament writers the Old Testament was authoritative and true; and it was the Old Testament as we

now have it, for although certain books were disputed until the time of the Council of Jamnia, yet that Council in fixing the limits of the Canon returned to the Canon of Judas Maccabæus. It is true that there are no references in the New Testament to Obadiah and Nahum, Ezra and Nehemiah, Esther, Canticles and Ecclesiastes—but there are satisfactory explanations for this. The Minor Prophets were reckoned as one canonical book; Ezra and Nehemiah are connected with Chronicles; and the peculiar character of the remaining books accounts for their not being referred to. The important points to notice are that the *groups* to which these books belong are recognized, thus presupposing the completed Canon; and that the Apocryphal books are not treated as being Holy Scripture, though familiar to the writers as contained in the Greek Bible, a fact which makes us doubt whether we can in any strict sense of the word speak of a Canon in connection with the Alexandrine Version.

The authority of our Lord may be appealed to to cover that of the Old Testament. The titles He applies to it imply that its books are sacred Scriptures and therefore authoritative. In the crises of His life we find Him using these Scriptures in such a way as to show us that that life was rooted in and ruled by Scripture. He uses the words of the Old Testament quite confidently as illustrating and explaining His own experiences. He uses the Old Testament for the development and enrichment of His own spiritual life. His parables and sayings are full of Old Testament reminiscences. Of its law and prophecy He is the fulfiller. He came not to abrogate the Law but to fulfil it. "He rendered perfect the doctrines handed down in Mosaic law, supplying to their precepts, accommodated as they were to the nature of a ruder age, that meaning which is required by the idea of true virtue, and which is especially adapted to a more perfect order of affairs." His interpretations of these Scriptures show that He distinguished what is absolute from what is relative; and although His opponents disputed His interpretations they never disputed the authority of that on which those interpretations were based. He did not impart an authority to the Scriptures, but recognized it as already existing. His saying, "Till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass away from the law till all things be accomplished," asserts the permanent value of the Old Testament.

The attitude of the Apostolic and other New Testament writers towards the Old Testament is substantially that of our Lord. The Old Testament scriptures are called "holy writings," "sacred letters," expressions which prove indubitably their authoritative value; their narratives are without any doubt referred to as historical facts; their words are looked upon as the voice of God to man, and as separated from all other literature; the permanent value of their great spiritual truths is taught; their witness to Christ is ever insisted upon, and the Christian hope in Christ is established by them. The general attitude is expressed in the words, "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning,

that through steadfastness and through comfort of the Scriptures we might have hope," and "Every scripture is inspired of God, and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for discipline, which is in righteousness; that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work."

If the New Testament be acknowledged as authoritative it carries with it the authority of the Old Testament. Their interdependence is such that one cannot be understood without the other—a New Testament could not have been written if an Old Testament did not exist. The Old Testament is incomplete, and needs something to supplement it. Christ is not read into it, but out of it; and by an inductive process, through an examination of the New Testament, we arrive at its divine authority. It was authoritative for the men to whom it was delivered, and was acknowledged as such; it is authoritative for us on such principles of interpretation as can be gathered from the teaching of Christ and of the New Testament writers, whose authority is guaranteed by the promise of their Master.

"No one but Christ Himself," says Ewald, "is the unity whose light shines back from the New Testament upon all the earlier books, and penetrates every part of these with His radiance. That which casts light upon all parts and yet enables us to see at the same time the gradations of this light in the separate parts, appears to us resplendent with double radiance and preciousness." The truths which constitute one organic body of revealed truth sanctify the vessel that contains them.

III

The argument for the authority of the Bible based on its work in the past and the work it still does I need not labour. The book when judged by its fitness to do its work shows itself to be authoritative. Its main purpose is to lead man into the presence of God, and this it does and always has done. A book which through extended periods of time has proved itself to be the means of the revelation of God to man is a book of peculiar value and authority. Dr. Moulton, in his Fernley Lecture, after describing the alarm felt amongst many Bible lovers at the onward march of criticism, says that in answer to their fears "God has provided His own answer, and as we might expect, it is an infinitely better one than we could devise. It is—the British and Foreign Bible Society! Through a century criticism has been proving the Bible truly human, written by human hands in human language, and liable in unessentials to human error. Through a century the Bible Society has been proving it divine . . . and wherever it has spoken signs and wonders have endorsed its message. The wilderness has blossomed as the rose, the madman sits clothed and in his right mind at the feet of a Saviour present still. While miracles like these continue to attest the uniqueness of our Book, we have small reason to be angry or

afraid, whatever science may determine concerning the human features of a message thus manifestly from God."

IV

The *testimonium Spiritus Sancti* was looked upon by the Reformers, in their revolt against ecclesiastical claims, as the crowning proof of the authority of Holy Scripture; and this is reflected in Coleridge's well known dictum, "In the Bible there is more that finds me than I have experienced in all other books put together; the words of the Bible find me at greater depths of my being; and whatever thus finds me brings with it an irresistible evidence of its having proceeded from the Holy Spirit."

The proof is one which from its very nature can only appeal to Christian people. "They know," it has been said, "with all the immediateness and certainty which can belong to any form of experience that their faith grounds itself upon this Word, and that their inner life corresponds to and confirms the facts and truths and promises of this Word. The authority of this Word, therefore, becomes to them an authority confirmed within their experience, in a perfectly invincible way." True! but what is the nature of such an authority? It can cover only matters in the ethico-religious sphere; and herein lies a weakness of the proof. It does not cover of necessity the whole Bible. To me, quite apart from any inner experience, the *whole* Bible is authoritative, not merely "a final authority of *faith* and *conduct*." It is for me authoritative not merely as containing the only true doctrine of redemption, the only guide to true faith and conduct, but also as containing the history of a race which was God's organ of revelation. Martineau's words are worth quoting: "In history the divine element lies hid; it is missed at the time even by those who are its vehicle. It comes forth at the end of the ages in the retrospect."

You cannot judge all the parts of Scripture by this argument of experience; it meets only certain distinctive teachings of Holy Writ; it fosters subjectivity unduly; and if pressed to its logical conclusion appears to me to evacuate, as dubiously authoritative, large portions of God's word written. "No religious experience can go to the length of enabling a man to recognize the divine inspiration and authority of every part of the Biblical books"; and, if this be so, the proof from the *testimonium Spiritus Sancti* can be but a subsidiary one. When I am told that "the element of truth at the heart of this appeal is the fact that the general experience comes in to confirm the individual faith, to correct its errors, enlarge its narrowness, and broaden its catholicity," I ask: Does the history of the Church confirm this statement? I think not. Parts of the Bible *may* be less authoritative than others subjectively—though who can say which?—but the *whole* Bible is authoritative, since every part of it contributes to the great scheme of redemption. From Genesis to St. John it contains an evangelical message.