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THE

FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE OF CHRISTIANITY AND OF PROTESTANTISM.

BY

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AUTHOR OF "THE FINDING OF THE BOOK."



"The Christianity of Christ is not one thing, and human nature another;— it is human Virtue, human Religion, man in his highest moments; the effect no less than the cause of human development, and can never fail till man ceases to be man."—*Theodore Parker.*

"The simple believeth every word; but the prudent man looketh well to his going."—*Solomon.*

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"Far, very far be it from any devout mind, out of an unwarranted, unreasonable, and most unnecessary jealousy, to arrest or stay the progress of inquiry, or look with a timid and suspicious eye on any honest efforts made to extend and diffuse the knowledge of nature. *The upright search after truth can NEVER be dangerous to him who lovingly engages in it, or dishonourable to Him who is the God of truth.* All scope is given to inquiry into all the wonders, whether of the material world without, or of the moral world within. It is your dignity, and duty so to inquire. You are men, and *you are COMMANDED to be men in understanding.* As men, you may assert your privilege of investigating all the works of your Creator; and in doing so, *you are to follow truth WHITHERSOEVER it may lead. You are not constituted the judges of consequences and results.* Your business is with the *facts and principles* of truth itself. You are not to determine what should be, or what might be,—*you are to discover what is.* This is the course becoming alike the power and the infirmity of reason. Within this limit you tread surely and safely. *Cast aside, then, all alarm as to what may follow from your inquiries.* Only prosecute these inquiries with due caution, and put them fairly and faithfully together, so as to ascertain real facts and draw none but legitimate conclusions. And we may fearlessly run the hazard of any inferences which they may suggest, confident that *they will ALL tend to shed new light and lustre on the wisdom* in which the Lord hath made all his manifold works."—*Dr Candlish, in "Reason and Revelation,"* pp. 139, 140.

"Every one declares against blindness, and yet who almost is not fond of that which dims his sight, and keeps the clear light out of his mind, which should lead him into truth and knowledge? False or doubtful positions, relied upon as unquestionable maxims, keep those in the dark from truth who build on them. Such are usually the prejudices imbibed from education, party, reverence, fashion, interest, &c. This is the mote which every one sees in his brother's eye, but never regards the beam in his own. For who is there almost that is ever brought fairly to examine his own principles, and see whether they are such as will bear the trial? But yet this should be one of the first things every one should set about, and be scrupulous in, who would rightly conduct his understanding in the search of truth and knowledge."—*John Locke.*

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I PROPOSE an experiment. Before reading my next sentence, I invite those who favour me with their attention to write down, or to think out, as I have just now been trying to do, such a general definition and explanation of the word PRIEST,* as shall fairly describe, and apply to, most or all of the different varieties of men, to whom the word is applicable.

Those who have done so may now compare their definition with mine, and see whether they at all agree or totally differ, and whether they contradict or supplement each other.

The definition which I propose is, that a priest is an officer or minister of a traditional or authoritative, and national or corporate, religious institution; and, as such, his distinctive mission is to be an exponent or advocate of a religious system or creed,

* "Our word *Priest* is corrupted of *Presbyter*. Our ancestors, the Saxons, first used *Preostre*, whence by further contraction came *Preste* and *Priest*. The high and low Dutch have *Priester*; the French *Prestre*; the Italian *Prète*; but the Spaniard only speaks full *Presbytero*."—*Richardson's English Dictionary*.

inculcating the belief or observance of certain dogmas or ceremonies, as the fundamental and indispensable condition of merit, privilege, and welfare, here or hereafter.

The language of the consistent priest is never—
'*Come up hither.* Open your eyes, look around, and behold and judge for yourselves, as I judge for myself, the goodness, the truth, and the reality, or the wickedness, the falsehood, and the delusion of those things to which I shall direct your attention, and which I shall endeavour to make you *understand.*' But his language is, '*Stand down.* If you wish to be regarded as a brother, and as a worthy member of the church or of the community, you must not place any reliance on the guidance of your own reason in those matters which I instruct you to regard as settled by the supreme authority; nor must you take the liberty to investigate for yourself the evidences of correctness and reality; but you must be content to receive, with faithful and entire submission of the intellect, the doctrines, the ceremonies, or the book, which I hold out to you authoritatively as the revealed *Will* or *Word* of God; and you must, in like manner, faithfully accept and adhere to that interpretation or application of what God has revealed, which has been sanctioned by the traditions of the institution, or by the institution itself, whose officer I am, as the only true interpretation or application thereof, and therefore as the rule and guide of your belief, worship, and life.'*

Reason is never invited by the priest to criticize, test, and candidly weigh the evidence for and against the authority to which he appeals. That authority

* "The whole order of the clergy are appointed by God to pray for others, to be ministers of his priesthood, to be followers of his advocacy, to stand between God and the people, and to present to God all their needs, and all their desires."—*Bishop Taylor, Sermon 6.*

is assumed to be supreme, and therefore above reason, and beyond the reach of argument, commanding absolutely the believing assent, with or without the rational verdict, of all men to whom it comes, and in some cases not even hesitating to doom, for their unbelief, those who never heard of it.*

The one fundamental argument of the priest, on which his entire system of belief is based, is—*Thus saith the Oracle*, or, *Thus it is written*. The truthfulness of the oracle or of the writing, as well as of the priestly or traditional interpretation, is postulated, not proved. The priest does not profess to have, but professes not to require, for himself or for others, such evidence and arguments in support of what he inculcates, as to secure the ratifying and approving verdict of the unprejudiced inquiring mind. His appeal is not primarily to the reason and conscience of men, but to their prejudices and emotions, such as those which arise from the influence of traditions and customs, or from habitual veneration and attachment to some external symbol or standard of authority, such as a Church, a Pope, an oracle, an image, or a book. He may, indeed, welcome with approval, and may even condescend to employ, a selection of evidences and arguments *in support* of the supreme authority to which he appeals; but such support is only regarded at the most as secondary and subsidiary, and is never represented by the consistent priest as the primary and essential basis, on which to found and establish the supremacy

* "What are they that imbrace the gospell but sonnes of God? What are churches but his families? Seeing therefore we receive the adoption and state of sonnes by their ministrie whom God hath chosen out for that purpose, seeing also that when we are the sonnes of God, our continuance is still vnder their care which were our progenitors, what better title could there bee given them than the reuerend name of presbyters, or fatherly guides?"—Hooker, *Eccl. Pol.*, b. v., s. 78.

of his authoritative standard or oracle. To find or exhibit any evidence or argument *against* the genuineness of this assumed supremacy, is by the priest accordingly denounced as a moral delinquency, a sacrilege or blasphemy, not to be met with rational reply and confutation, but to be simply abhorred and condemned as treason against the Supreme.

The *assertion* of some supreme external standard or symbol of authority, being thus the distinctive and fundamental doctrine of every priest, it follows unavoidably that he practically assumes infallibility for himself, or for the institution whose views he expresses; because he requires his assertion to be believed without being tested, by the *submission*, and not by the *free action* and verdict of reason, and because he ignores or denies the right of reason to investigate and to weigh impartially the evidence and arguments on all sides, and so to judge of the truth or falsehood—the certainty or uncertainty of the supreme authority asserted by him. It is manifest that the supreme authority, thus dogmatically and authoritatively ascribed to a book or to anything external and apart from individual reason, not being based upon the free appreciation of its intrinsic and demonstrable merits and evidences, is practically and truly based upon *some other* assumed authority, to which reason is required to bow. It is impossible to get out of the dilemma, however much sophistry may be employed to disguise it. The man who declares to other men that a book or other external thing is a revelation, and that its authority is above reason, practically claims for himself infallibility and supreme authority *on that point*, and, by necessary logical implication, *on all points*.

If the supreme authority of the book, or other external thing, is based on the manifest or provable truthfulness and harmony of all that it attests, or upon the clearness and completeness of all the evi-

dence regarding it, then reason must be invited and employed to scrutinize its purport and its claims, in order that these qualities may be ascertained and recognised. But if all such rational tests be rejected, there is only one other ground that can possibly be taken, and that is an appeal to *another* external authority for support to the first. The claims of the highest authority must either rest upon the manifestation to reason of its evidence and merits, or else upon another authority behind it; and, in either case, that which is appealed to must be at least equal in dignity to that which it has to sustain. Perfection cannot be rationally inferred where imperfection is discerned; neither can infallibility be sufficiently attested by aught that is fallible, nor supreme authority by aught that is not itself supreme.

I conceive that thus far these remarks and reflections have been so framed as to be fairly applicable to the priests of many and widely different religions, ancient and modern, as well as to those of popular Christianity, both Catholic and Protestant. But my readers will, of course, have understood that I have kept the priests of Protestantism especially in view.

The modern Protestant Christian Churches, though in many speculative inferences and doctrines widely differing from each other, are generally understood and represented as, all alike, asserting, appealing to, and resting on, the infallibility or supreme authority of the Bible, while renouncing all pretensions to infallibility of their own, as Churches or as men. None of them, so far as I can learn, has ever ventured formally to declare that the authority of the Church or of tradition, as embodied in the "Articles of Religion," the "Confession of Faith," or any other "Ecclesiastical Standard," is sufficient to establish, and to impose upon the human conscience, the duty of believing the infallibility or supreme authority of the Bible, or indeed the duty of believing any doctrine

whatever. On the contrary, it is expressly declared by every Protestant Church, that no Church is infallible,—that Synods and Councils have erred, and are liable to err, from which the inference is direct and inevitable, that any doctrine, resting merely on such authority, ought to be held subject to the free investigation, reconsideration, and independent judgment, not only of all succeeding synods and councils, but of every individual who has light enough to discern the vast difference, which distinguishes faith in God and in truth from *faith in the faith of other men*. And yet, with gross inconsistency and self-contradiction, partly in the several ecclesiastical “Standards,” but much more glaringly in the ministrations of very many priests, the idea is constantly inculcated, and therefore of course it is widely entertained, that the traditional dogmas of the Churches are indisputable and infallible, at least on those points which are considered fundamental and essential, and especially on *this* point, viz. the supreme authority of the Bible; and that it is blasphemous presumption for any inquirer to subject *their assertion* on *this* point to rational investigation, and to the free judgment of his individual reason.*

They who are fallible are continually asserting that the Bible is the holy, authoritative, infallible, Word of God; and that no man is at liberty to form a dif-

* “Orthodoxy, finding itself unsafe in the domains of argument, flies towards those of moral sentiments; and just at the moment when it might be expected to surrender, it turns sharply round, and boldly charges REASON with SIN. This is an alarming charge. Before this moral discovery, we exerted our reason to the utmost of our power, confident that we had no spiritual danger to fear: now, most unfortunately, we are made to suspect that our sin may be great in proportion to the power of our arguments. What indeed, in common language, we call PRIDE, is usually connected with *power*, and the existence of the latter is for most people, a pretty strong presumption of the presence of the former. It must therefore happen, that, when reason is accused of

ferent opinion, nor has a right to investigate, nor freely to discuss the evidence for and against *their assertion*; but that every man is bound to submit his reason to that supreme authority above reason, which *they assert* that the Bible rightfully claims and possesses. Those who do so are driven to employ any amount of sophistry to conceal from others and perhaps even from themselves the plain logical fact, that to assert in this absolute way the infallibility or supremacy of the Bible, and the imperative duty of human reason bowing to its teaching, is really and practically to assert the infallibility or supreme authority of the Church, or of the man, by whom such assertion is made.

This absurd and self-condemned position appears to be at present held, in some degree, by every Protestant Church. But far beyond the comparatively mild and half-concealed absurdity of any Protestant Confession, very many of those clergymen and clerical men, who delight to be called "*orthodox*," habitually state and vindicate this "Gospel of Unreason" in all its barefaced breadth of boldness and inconsistency.

The attempt has indeed been often made, by reasoning against reason, to reconcile freedom of thought with intellectual submission to the Bible; "to reconcile Reason and the Bible," by so displaying and enhancing all available internal and external evidence in support of the Bible, and by so ignoring pride, the charge will appear already more than half substantiated, if reason has been too hard for the opponents. Power of any kind, unless it can reward and punish to a certain degree, is not an enviable possession. I have no doubt that if a *sin*, to be called PRIDE OF SIGHT, had been as necessary to some influential class, as the PRIDE OF REASON is to the orthodox parties all over the world; every long and sharp-sighted man, who wished to live in peace, and avoid the scandal of discovering things which his neighbours either could or would not see, would now be obliged to wear spectacles."—*Observations on Heresy and Orthodoxy*, by the Rev. Jos. Blanco White.

and disparaging, or endeavouring to explain away, all internal and external evidence of an opposite kind, as to make it appear to many superficial thinkers, or too willing believers, that the whole is in harmony with every part, that all its doctrines and statements are in perfect accordance with the evidence and with each other, and that all the relative evidence will bear the strictest investigation, being such as, when justly weighed, will carry complete conviction to every honest candid mind, appealing to the serious, upright exercise of unprejudiced human reason, and thus meriting and commanding the approving and ratifying verdict of all but those who are too stupid or too wicked to give it proper attention.

So long as the belief in the Bible was an honest and sincere belief, such was the reasoning, variously illustrated, by which that belief was sustained and propagated. Such is the language of the "Articles," and especially of the "Confession of Faith" :—

Confession i. 5. "We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to an high and reverend esteem of the Holy Scripture, and the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, *the consent of all the parts*, the scope of the whole (which is to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are ARGUMENTS WHEREBY IT DOTH ABUNDANTLY EVIDENCE ITSELF to be the Word of God."

Such was the language of the Reformers in the sixteenth century, and of the great Protestant divines in the seventeenth. Listen to Richard Hooker, one of the most learned and gifted theological writers of the post-Reformation period :—

"Judge you of that which I speak, saith the apostle. In vain it were to speak anything of God, but that by reason men are able somewhat to judge of what they hear, and by discourse to discern how consonant it is to truth. Scripture, indeed, teacheth things above nature, things

which our reason, by itself, could not reach unto. Yet those also we believe, knowing BY REASON that the Scripture is the Word of God. . . . A number there are who think they cannot admire as they ought the power and authority of the Word of God, if in things divine they should attribute any force to man's reason; for which cause they never use reason so willingly as to disgrace reason. . . . By these and the like disputes, an opinion hath spread itself very far in the world, as if the way to be ripe in faith were to be raw in wit and judgment; as if reason were an enemy unto religion, childish simplicity the mother of ghostly and divine wisdom."

Or let us consult, upon this subject, William Chillingworth, author of the famous work entitled "The Religion of the Protestants a Safe Way to Salvation," published in 1637, and of the still more famous saying which is so often quoted: "The Bible, and the Bible alone, is the religion of Protestants" :—

"But you that would not have men follow their reason, what would you have them follow? their passions, or pluck out their eyes and go blindfold? No, you say; you would have them follow authority. In God's name, let them: we also would have them follow authority; for it is upon the authority of universal tradition that we would have them believe Scripture. But then, as for the authority which you would have them follow, you will let them see reason why they should follow it. And is not this to go a little about—to leave reason for a short turn, and then to come to it again, and to do that which you condemn in others? It being, indeed, A PLAIN IMPOSSIBILITY FOR ANY MAN TO SUBMIT HIS REASON BUT TO REASON; for he that doth it to authority must of necessity think himself to have greater reason to believe that authority."

It is not likely to be denied that these specimens fairly and fitly represent the distinctive views and teachings of the Reformers and early Protestant divines, on reason as the basis of all religious belief, and on the complete harmony which they conceived to exist between reason and the Bible. Assuming, as we well may, that their language is honest and

sincere, and that they meant exactly what they have said, it is clear that, as held by them, theirs was a reasonable faith, and that they did not feel called upon to settle any visible conflict between the claims of reason and those of the Bible, nor experience any difficulty in harmonizing these with each other, and putting faith in BOTH. Their religious belief was by them identified with their intellectual conclusion regarding the authority of the Bible; so that their utterances on the subject express both the conviction of their hearts and the rational judgment of their minds. The same kind of reasoning may even now be heard from some believers, in whose experience these two things still go together, and from some others who wish to make it appear that they find it so.

But the conflict which then slumbered, being apparently unsuspected by religious men in those days, has been since then steadily growing in urgency and importance, exactly in proportion to the increasing diffusion of knowledge and general progress of intelligence, until it has now become difficult to find an intelligent thinking man who believes, as the Reformers did, in BOTH *Reason AND the Bible*, as harmonizing together, and mutually supporting each other. The conflict has, in recent times, and especially of late, become so manifest and notorious, that a profession of faith, in the old alliance or compromise of the two rival claims, now suggests ignorance, imbecility, or wilful deception; and the ordinary experience of an inquirer is accordingly very different from what it formerly was, for he finds that the question fronting him no longer admits of any but an alternative and one-sided solution; so that, if he does not shirk it altogether, and remain indifferent or in suspense, he must decide for himself whether his reason shall be subjected to the Bible, or whether the Bible shall be subjected to his reason.

The reconciliation of the two is a task very seldom

now undertaken for the public, or accomplished by individuals for themselves, except by the uninformed, the shallow-minded, or the unthinking. Easy-going, peace-loving clergymen may sometimes still be heard trying it in the pulpit; but it has almost ceased to appear in print, the advocates on both sides appearing to be nearly unanimous on this one point, that such an undertaking is now hopelessly difficult, and that a genuine reconciliation is henceforth impossible, on any conditions short of the subjection of one claimant to the supremacy of the other.

It is, therefore, not my purpose to enter here upon an examination of the various methods of reconciliation which have been suggested. Some of them are utterly absurd, and even ridiculous; and it is safe to say that none of them can have any plausibility beyond what may be purchased by the free employment of sophistry and assumption, tricks which, until recent times, were comparatively safe from detection and exposure, though it is gradually becoming more difficult and more hazardous to employ them.

One of the latest and ablest attempts of this kind, that of the late Dean Alford, in his "*New Testament for English Readers*," which may fairly be regarded as embodying the best and most plausible features of all previous attempts to effect the desired reconciliation, has been most skilfully and completely sifted and exploded in previous pamphlets of this series, which probably most of my readers have seen, and which any of them may easily procure.*

My intention is to deal here only with the pleadings and pretensions of those more numerous (at least in Scotland), and *in their own way* more consistent, advocates of the Bible, who apparently do not believe, as the old Protestant divines and the

* "*Commentators and Hierophants*," Parts I. and II., price Sixpence each. See list on the last page of this pamphlet.

Westminster Assembly did, in the possibility and duty of the reconciliation, and who do not even seem to desire it, preferring to insist, as honest true Protestants never did, upon the absolute surrender and submission of Reason to the Bible.

Those who hold the views which these advocates express have, apparently without knowing it, as completely departed in one direction from the standpoint of the men of the Reformation, as those who require the submission of the Bible to Reason have departed from it in another and opposite direction. Both parties alike have felt compelled to settle the question one way or another. Neither party has found it possible to harmonize the conflicting claims, nor to find any satisfaction in compromising them. The one party has decided one way, and the other another way, that question which the Reformers did not take up, and did not feel called upon to settle. Let neither of these parties be deluded with the idea that they are maintaining the standpoint of the Reformers with regard to the Bible. *That standpoint was, as they clearly tell us, the then generally admitted harmony and agreement of Reason and the Bible.* If we only try seriously to imagine such men as the old Protestant Reformers *compelled*, as both of the parties in question have been compelled, to abandon that standpoint, to acknowledge the irreconcilable antagonism of the two, and to take the one side or the other, by deciding for themselves whether their reason should submit to be judged by the Bible, or the Bible to be judged by their reason; we can scarcely fail to understand which side ought to be taken by true *Protestants* now, and which side savours more of the old *Popish* superstition.

It has of late been remarked by many, that, instead of grappling with, and undertaking to refute, in the pulpit or in the press, any or all of the really formid-

able and increasing arguments of objectors,—those who maintain the traditional dogma, that the Bible is the Word of God, have for some time past, almost without exception, been timidly affecting to treat the arguments with silent contempt, while at the same time treating the persons, by whom these arguments are urged, with wrathful condemnation instead of any reply.

It is usual for them to say that none of these arguments or objections are new, which, nevertheless, some of them are, though surely age alone is no dishonour ; and that they have all been, long ago, hundreds of times, satisfactorily answered. The explanation of which appears to be, that when the minds of men were more easily satisfied with such answers as might still be given, there was no lack of satisfactory answers. Whether this sufficiently explains it or not, the phenomenon is notorious, that the arguments of the objectors are from day to day becoming more general, more formidable, and more convincing than ever ; while the arguments in reply, as distinguished from the mere denunciations by the maintainers, are becoming more and more obsolete, impotent, and worthless ; so much so, that they seem to have very much escaped the notice or memory of both parties alike. Unquestionably, however, there have been, and must have been, plenty of "*sound orthodox*" arguments and replies, which may have done good service to their employers in their own day and generation, though these might now have an effect quite opposed to that which they were formerly understood to have ; because the question now agitating men's minds is comparatively A NEW QUESTION, to which the old arguments and replies cannot be easily adapted, having been originally addressed to the reason ; whereas men would now employ them to reason *against* reason—a peculiarly delicate task !

There was a time when a very distinguished

Father of the Church, the earliest distinct witness for the authenticity of the fourth Gospel, could argue with acceptance that there must be four Gospels, and only four, *because*—there were four winds, and four elements, and four beasts in the vision of Ezekiel! Such an argument is of no use now.

There was a time, not so long ago, when it was generally considered satisfactory to argue that, as God's ancient people were commanded to extirpate heretics, and to destroy them utterly, so it was clearly the duty of God's people still to do the same thing; and the stake, or the dungeon, or some *sufficient* penalty, was deemed by Catholics and Protestants alike, as it had been deemed by the Jews of old, the most appropriate answer to all sorts of objections. Such arguments are now out of date, at least in this part of the world.

There has been a time, not yet gone by, though we may hope that it is now gradually passing away, when, beyond "the three mechanical R's," the whole idea of ordinary education has been, to furnish the mind of the pupil with a complete panoply of stereotyped ideas and ready-made conclusions, handed down by tradition, regarding every branch of knowledge, as well as regarding religion and the Bible. It is only now, or of late years, that the idea has begun to prevail, and no doubt is very rapidly spreading, that, instead of merely cramming the mind with assertions and dogmas, the far nobler aim of education ought to be, the instruction and training of each individual in the separate personal use of his own mental faculties, by calling these faculties constantly into exercise upon his own experience and observation, as well as upon all his lessons and studies, which for children ought to be selected and directed by teachers or guardians, having the principle of intellectual liberty rooted in their hearts, and keeping that principle steadily in view.

The foremost educationists are now striving to discover the most effectual methods of accustoming the young mind to think, to reflect, to investigate, to compare, and to test everything for itself, searching everywhere, and always, for truthfulness and reality, so that it may learn to know and understand the certainty, or the certain doubtfulness, of everything in which it is instructed; and, above all, that it may, as it ripens, become acquainted with its own natural inherent right to judge for itself of the good or evil, the truth or falsehood, the certainty or uncertainty of everything to which its attention may be directed; of which right, at least in several of its most important applications, the vast majority of minds have hitherto been trained in profound practical ignorance, thinly veiled, if veiled at all, by a few fine-sounding phrases about the reverence or respect due to this or that authority.

There cannot be a doubt about it, that a great change in this direction, is coming gradually over the whole united nation. There is at present a very distinct prospect and intention of improvement. We really do seem to be making a fresh start onwards towards liberty and light. It is indeed both a grand and a true thing to say, in the prophetic words of our greatest orator, John Bright,—“I think I see, as it were, above the hill-tops of time, the glimmering of the dawn of a better day, for the people and the country that I love so well!” It may seem rather sanguine, but no longer seems chimerical, to hope that even a middle-aged man may live to see the children of the people trained, each in the knowledge and use of his or her birthright as one of God’s children,—the birthright of liberty,—complete freedom of reason and of conscience,—the very liberty which the “Sons of God” and “enlightened ones” have in all ages striven, and often sacrificed themselves in the attempt, to make mankind understand and use

as their own. This is at once the scientific and the truly Protestant, because truly Christian idea of education,—the education of the future,—a religious, moral, and intellectual education.

Surely it would be an evidence of blind delusion, or else of gross presumption and falsehood, were any man to say that this aspiration is evil, or to condemn it with opprobrious epithets as scepticism and infidelity. It is the result and expression of FAITH,—*religious faith* in God, in Goodness, and in Truth, as revealed to the inquiring mind, chiefly through the contrasts drawn and discerned, between these intellectual conceptions on the one hand, and atheism, idolatry, falsehood, or evil, on the other, by the free and serious exercise of Reason—God's gift for man's guidance, the conscientious verdict of which may well be called, figuratively, "*the Word of God*" to each individual. As to the duty or advantage of *faith in the faith of other men*, whether these men be the ancient authors of the Bible, or their more unreasonable modern expounders, call me sceptic, or infidel if you will:—only let the distinction which is here drawn be clearly understood.

We may read the 145th Psalm, for example, with intense appreciation of the sublime religious thought which its stanzas express, and our minds may well be filled with admiration and delight, especially when due emphasis is laid upon the word "ALL," which frequently recurs and appears to be the key-note of the piece. If there be anything in the Psalm, such as the phrase at the close of the 19th verse,—"*All the wicked will he destroy*,"—which may seem to jar against or contradict the rest, surely we may freely try to interpret for ourselves the mind of the poet, so as to harmonize the apparent discord, as by reflecting that he has just before expressed his faith in God, as *good to ALL, upholding ALL that fall, and raising up ALL those that be bowed down*, and that therefore the meaning

of what is said about the wicked must be, that God will destroy or bring to an end all their wickedness, and thus raise up all those whom even their own wickedness has caused to fall or to be bowed down, so that there shall be no more any wicked. Such liberties are taken by *all* commentators on the Bible, under the guise of *interpretation*; but in reality it is putting one set of words in place of another; and we may just as consistently altogether reject the jarring note, either because we may not be able to harmonize it with the rest, or because we may find that its acceptance would upset all our ideas of intellectual and moral perfection of character, as attributed to the "Father of the spirits of all flesh," and that it is therefore incredible or unintelligible to us.

This Psalm in a high degree, like every other lesson in its own degree, becomes a revelation to our minds, just in proportion to the clearness and force of the free judicial verdict, which our reason and conscience may be thereby stimulated and assisted to arrive at regarding those matters which, to our minds, it illustrates, or brings before our view.

Let us never forget, what it is mere priestcraft to deny, that it is every man's inalienable right, and his duty, so far as it may be opportunely in his power, as a man, as a Christian, and as a Protestant, to investigate, examine, and judge every portion of the Bible, as well as every other item of his information and experience, and to arrive at his own individual conclusions, with entire fulness of mental freedom. The serious, honest, and deliberate exercise of this freedom, is at least one true and real meaning of the figurative phrase,—"*Faith in the Word of God*,"—which is a quite intelligible way of expressing a religious man's experience of it; as are also the less figurative phrases,—"*true wisdom*," "*good understanding*," "*liberation of the intellect*," "*rational belief*."

It is not improbable that some may condemn these views, or protest against them, as seeming "to exalt reason to the place of God;" but the position here maintained is merely that Reason is the faculty or instrument with which God has endowed us, by the proper personal use of which, alone, it is possible for any of us to convert information and experience into sound knowledge about anything whatever.

Those who may say that it is "*spiritual pride*" and "*presumption*" thus to test everything by the verdict of Reason, ought to be reminded that, in so far as Reason may be set aside, the only other test which can possibly be substituted for it is that of our own sentiments or emotions, such as veneration, esteem, attachment, or fear; and this ought to make them pause and reflect, before venturing to affirm that such things as these ought to control our Reason, instead of being regulated and controlled thereby; because, in the clear and strong words of Archbishop Whately, the humiliation of Reason which they require "is a prostration, not of ourselves before God, but of one part of ourselves before another part; and there is surely at least as much presumption in measuring everything by our own feelings, fancies, and prejudices, as by our own reasonings."*

It is beyond a question, that there has of late been a vast increase of open and avowed opposition to the dogma, that the Bible, in all its parts and in all its words, is the Word of God; and, though it is of course less manifest, it is nearly as certain, that doubt, unbelief, and *silent* opposition have increased to an immeasurably greater extent.

It is also perfectly well known, and quite indisputable, that the argumentative strength of the opposition has of late been displayed with very much greater vigour, fulness, and effect than it ever was in this

* Whately's Notes to Bacon's Essay on Truth.

country before ; partly by the production of *new* evidence, criticism, and arguments ; but chiefly by the more frequent and more extended publication, reading, hearing, and especially *understanding*, of the *old*.

With regard to the extent of publication, reading, and hearing, however, it must be admitted that the advocates of the dogma have hitherto had, and still have, an immense advantage over their opponents. Indeed, they may be said to have had, until recent years, *almost* the entire influence of the pulpit, the press, and the school, on their side ; and the rule is clearly still the same, although the exceptions are becoming more numerous. It is only in the matter of *understanding* that the strength of the opposition will bear any comparison ; and were it not for *this*, the Bible party would have no cause for their present uneasiness and alarm. The assailants of the dogma are constantly producing evidence and arguments, which men *can understand* and feel the force of ; whereas the very few so-called replies, and the very many assertions and so-called reasonings, of the defenders, are either *not understood*, or else understood to be powerless.

It would be cumbrous, and it is not my plan, to introduce here any quotations or reproductions of the abundant evidence and arguments, which go to prove that the dogma is false. Most of my readers are, probably, in some measure acquainted with them ; and I cannot, for the present, do better than refer the inquirer on this head to Mr Thomas Scott's series of publications, a list of which will be found at the end of this pamphlet, nearly all bearing directly on the point.

I prefer here to invite attention to the startling effect, which the recent attacks of the comparatively few assailants have had upon the attitude of the vastly more numerous defenders of the dogma, and to a few brief illustrations of the mode in which these

attacks are being met, by some of the most zealous champions of what is called "orthodoxy."

I have already observed how remarkably rare has become the inclination of these champions to deal with rational argument, and how chary they generally are about grappling with the arguments of their opponents. Among those who are altogether innocent of reasoning about the matter, are to be found the most unrestrained shouters of anathema against the objectors, whose objections they studiously evade. They bewail the manifest increase of free thought among their people, attributing all sorts of evil motives to those who openly profess it, and proclaiming that "*God will surely punish*" those who deny the supreme authority of the Scriptures, but never attempting a word of rational reply or refutation.

Does any one doubt it, or think this exaggeration? There is abundance of evidence at hand, from which only a few selections can here be made. Doubtless, many of my readers are familiar with it. There is even a strong probability, though the experiment has not yet been tried, that, in Scotland at least, and I suppose not in Scotland alone, the specimens, which I am to quote, would be pronounced "*sound*" and "*orthodox*" by the majority of clergymen of all denominations. Not a few might perhaps say that they exemplify "*a somewhat indiscreet advocacy of the truth,*" or that they are decidedly "*rather too orthodox;*" but it is very doubtful, whether any considerable number of those who are included under the name *Priest*, as defined in the beginning of this tract, would choose to characterize these things as they deserve, viz., as arrogant Popish assertions and malignant unchristian calumnies, irreconcilable with reason, truth, and evidence.

A lecture, addressed to the Students of Divinity, at the opening of the Free Church College, Glasgow,

in November 1870, by the Rev. Dr Gibson, Professor of Divinity and Church History, on "Some Present Aspects of Religious Opinion," supplies the following illustrations.*

"The more conscience is enlightened by the religion of Christ as the Great Prophet of His Church—in other words, by the Bible, the revelation of His Holy Spirit—the more do the principles of Christianity find in it an approving response. Hence Paul says, 2 Cor. iv. 2: '*By manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God;*' not to every man's conscience or reason as the supreme authority to judge, or—as heralded by a *candidate for notoriety* in our city—the absolute and divine authority of reason, conscience, and love as 'the only ground of faith,' but the absolute authority of God in what He reveals and commands, and to which reason and conscience are bound to submit. If they do not, it is at the peril of the poor mortal who refuses, and puts *his* poor reason and conscience and love, small and variable as his love is, on a level with the authority of the God of truth and holiness and love. This manifestation of truth to every man's conscience as in the sight of God, so as to leave him without excuse, can be shown of every one of the doctrines and precepts of Scripture."

It is not a little surprising that Dr Gibson should quote these words of Paul, in support of the dogma that "*reason and conscience are bound to submit*" to the doctrines and precepts of Scripture, as to "the absolute authority of God in what He reveals and commands." Why? Because it is that very dogma against which Paul is there contending, having just before called the law of Moses "the ministration of death," which, he says, "is done away." In contrast to the deadness of that law, he proposes, *by manifestation of the truth*, to commend his own doctrine to EVERY MAN'S CONSCIENCE. This sounds wonderfully like appealing to "the authority of reason, conscience, and love, as the only ground of faith." But does not

* Published in the "Watchword," a Free Church Magazine, for December 1870, and for January 1871.

the Professor himself virtually make the same appeal, when he affirms that the truth of every one of the doctrines and precepts of Scripture can be manifested to every man's conscience in the sight of God? It becomes merely a question of experimental fact, as to whether or not the assertion will stand the test of application. Let it be applied, for example, to the following passages, selected almost at random:—

Exod. xxxii. 27—"Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Put every man his sword by his side, and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and *slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbour.*"

Exod. xx. 13—"Thou shalt not kill."

Mal. iii. 6—"I am the Lord; I CHANGE NOT."

Gen. vi. 6—"And it *repented the Lord* that he had made man on the earth, and it *grieved him* at his heart."

Exod. xxix. 36—"Thou shalt offer every day a bullock for a sin-offering for atonement."

Levit. i. 9—"And the priest shall burn it all on the altar to be a burnt sacrifice, an offering made by fire, of a *sweet savour unto the Lord.*"

Jer. vii. 21, 22—"Thus saith the Lord. . . . *I spake not unto your fathers nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt-offerings or sacrifices.*"

Heb. x. 6—"In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin *thou hast had no pleasure.*"

Acts x. 34—"God is no respecter of persons."

Mal. i. 2, 3—"Was not Esau Jacob's brother? saith the Lord: yet I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau." (*"The children being not yet born."*—Rom. ix. 11-13.)

Gal. v. 22—"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, faith."

Jud. xv. 14, 15—"And the Spirit of the Lord came upon him, and *he slew a thousand men.*"

Deut. vii. 16—"Thou shalt *consume all the people*

which the Lord thy God shall deliver thee ; thine eye shall have *no pity* upon them.

1 Sam. xv. 3—"Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not ; but *slay both man and woman, infant and suckling.*"

Isa. i. 18—"Come now and *let us reason together*, saith the Lord."

Rom. ix. 18-21—"Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God ?" &c.

Mat. xxiii. 2, 3—"The Scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat : all therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do."

If Dr Gibson really understands how "the *manifestation of truth* to every man's conscience, as in the sight of God, so as to leave him without excuse, CAN BE SHOWN" of the many such doctrines, precepts, and contradictions of Scripture as these, it is surely most desirable, that he should verify his assertion by showing the manifestation, because few men are likely to discover it for themselves.

"Conscience is a creature, therefore a subject, and not a sovereign, and is under law. What law, and whence does it proceed ? It must rest in, and proceed from Him who is its Lord. How, then, does He, or has He expressed it ?

"Without entering into abstract discussion, I think I may affirm that it cannot be in natural conscience as man now exists in the earth. Why so ? Because you cannot survey it in the light of history, of facts, ancient or modern, either in the most limited or in the widest range either of time or place, without coming to the conclusion that its decisions have been so contradictory as to put 'darkness for light and light for darkness, evil for good and good for evil, bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.' What, then, is the expression of His Lordship ? and where is it to be found ? All Christian men must at once say, in the Law of the Lord revealed in the Bible. It is plain that conscience, as a subject, cannot have a right to rule above its Creator and Lord. Equally plain is it that this law, if it can be found, it must obey ; in other words, there must be an au-

thority. But that authority must be God himself. Assuming that there is a judgment-day, and that man is responsible for his belief, one can hardly imagine each mortal man daring to plead, at the great day, his conscience to determine the judgment of the Most High. The authority, then, must be the authority of God himself. It cannot be anything short of its Lord.

"It is to this authority I refer when I affirm that a dread, and consequently a hatred of authority is one present aspect of religious opinion."

The argument, here employed against "natural conscience," is perfectly good against those who assert human infallibility or the supreme authority of any man's mind, or of any man's writings, over the minds of other men. It is, therefore, perfectly good against the authority claimed for the Bible. Why so? Because we cannot survey the Bible in the light of history and facts, without coming to the conclusion that its laws, doctrines, and statements are often so contradictory as to put darkness for light and light for darkness, evil for good and good for evil; as witness the numberless irreconcilable contradictions, which abound in many parts of it, and even in the Gospels.* Natural conscience or reason, when reasonably exercised, enables us to discern errors and contradictions, and to draw lessons of wisdom both from those of other men and from our own, as well as from those of the Bible.

That which is "*affirmed*" about "*dread, and conse-*

* For countless contradictions, both historical and doctrinal, in the Old Testament, I may refer the inquiring reader to Mr. F. W. Newman's "*History of the Hebrew Monarchy*," (published by Trübner and Co., London); and I take this opportunity of acknowledging that the train of argument, pursued in my own essay on "*The Finding of the Book*," was suggested and greatly aided by Mr Newman's most admirable and instructive work.

For similar criticism of the New Testament, I would refer especially to "*The Evangelist and the Divine*."—See list on last page.

quently hatred of authority," if not purely imaginary, would require to be supported by evidence showing to what class of men it applies; because, as regards such men as Bishop Colenso, Mr Voysey, the authors of "Essays and Reviews," or the large class who sympathise with them, it would be a quite unfounded calumny to affirm, that they are influenced by "*dread, and consequently hatred of authority.*" It would surely be both more charitable and more correct to say, that *discovery and rejection of false authority*, proceeding from the love of truth and the hatred of falsehood, is one present aspect of religious opinion.

"Protestantism is not the right in the sight of God to hold any opinion which each individual pleases, but the right and *duty* of every human being to regulate his belief by the unerring standard of the Holy Scriptures; and that God being Lord, and the alone Lord of the conscience, no man, or set, or combination of men, may resist his authority. . . . God's Word is a law, distinct, intelligible, and immediate; whereas any other, under whatever guise or form—the Church, the Pope, the Reason—is a usurpation of the rights both of God and man."

When Dr. Gibson says that, if Church, Pope, or Reason be set up as a law over the individual conscience, they usurp the rights both of God and man, he utters a truth which every free man and noble nature would die to maintain. But then, *Reason* in this connection cannot mean a man's own reason; for it must be something *external* to him, as Church and Pope are.

Not to dwell upon the commonplace absurdity of imagining that it is in the *power* of any individual to believe *what he pleases!* the question forcibly suggests itself,—Shall any man, such as Dr Gibson, or shall any combination of men, such as a Protestant Church, presume to come between other men and God, by holding up before them a book, with the ASSERTION that all are bound to accept it as the Word of God,

without any evidence, or without any right on their part to investigate and weigh all available evidence,—and that if they allow their reason to decide for themselves *individually*, whether such assertion is truthful, credible, uncertain, or false, they are guilty of “a usurpation of the rights both of God and man?”

It would be well for Dr Gibson to ponder over the following apostolic words:—“*Hast thou faith? HAVE IT TO THYSELF before God. Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth!*” (Rom. xiv. 22.)

“Is it bigotry, fanaticism, ecclesiasticism? Are these what we wish to defend and establish, as is asserted by great men and small men? If such things can be justly applied to the authority of Holy Scripture, we at once say that they are what we wish to defend and establish. But the assertion, by whomsoever made, is a calumny on us, and a **BLASPHEMY AGAINST HOLY SCRIPTURE.**” (!) “The antidote, we have seen, is the revealed Word of God—the Holy Scriptures, to be received and believed, not on the authority of any man or Church, but on the authority of God himself, *because it is the Word of God*” (!) “speaking to us directly and immediately as a man speaking to his friend. This is the sure foundation of all belief. If God does speak in His works, in the conscience, and, above all, in His written Word, which is invariable and ‘endureth for ever,’—all with His own mouth, or, which is the same thing, by His own Spirit in His Word, man must listen and obey; and it is impious and at man’s peril if he disobey, reason or prate about inner light or inner consciousness, or spirit of the age, or public opinion, as he may. Of all the delusions into which the weak and inexperienced are so apt to fall, none is greater than that of imagining that running with the tide is a proof of deep thought, of deep learning, or high courage and independence. It is the very reverse—a proof of a weak and slavish spirit that is afraid to stand by the truth and abide the frown or sneer of men of no higher authority than itself. Think for yourselves, gentlemen, as against man; but beware of thinking for yourselves as against God.”

In reply to Dr Gibson’s questions, it is sufficient to

observe that *bigotry* signifies stubborn adherence to an unreasonable opinion, and that what he says about "blasphemy" sounds wonderfully like *fanaticism*, or excessive and indiscreet zeal.

It would be a grand good thing if all who heard, and all who may read, the last quoted sentence, would act upon the advice there given, by thinking for themselves as against Dr Gibson, or as against any man who may, like him, dictate dogma in their hearing. Scarcely even Dr Gibson will venture to say that those who do so are therein guilty of thinking for themselves "*as against God!*" On the contrary it will be, and has been, in many cases, found by inquirers, that for them to acknowledge all the words of the Bible to possess the authority of God, would involve on their part the quenching or resisting of that "Word of God," which constantly addresses itself to their reason and conscience in the Books of Creation and Providence, as well as in the Books of Experience and History, both past and present, including, of course, the experience and history of which the Bible is the vehicle. Just in so far as all these "Books" are observed and studied, will THE "Word of God" which men are often compelled to hear and to obey even when not listening for it, which can be heard nowhere but in the reason and conscience of the individual, and which Dr Gibson also professes to recognise, be understood, and its authority be recognised and acknowledged by Reason.

"*Running with the tide,*" as the Professor phrases it, is, in itself, neither a proof of deep thought and high courage, nor of the reverse; but is a propensity of our nature, so strong that good men, and even great men, have often been led astray by it. In fact it is much more than probable that this very propensity restrains many at the present time from thinking freely, and from saying what they think, about the Bible. The frown, and sneer, and social intolerance

of orthodox people are still powerful enough to be really dreaded by dependent or timid "freethinkers;" for there is no lack of evidence, to prove, that those bolder ones who do venture to think and to speak freely, against the unreasonable assertions of the advocates for the supremacy of the Bible over Reason, are not yet "*running with the tide.*" It cannot be denied, however, that there are some signs of the approaching *turning time.*

Throughout the whole lecture, there is not the slightest allusion to evidence, either for or against the dogma. It would, indeed, appear that, according to Dr Gibson, all evidence is quite superfluous and useless or worse; for there is not one single argument employed by him in support of his dogma, which does not openly and avowedly rest *upon that dogma itself*, as in the passages quoted, and these are the strongest and most argumentative which I have been able to select.

It would be amazing, and almost incredible, if it were not elsewhere so common, to find that an experienced Professor of Church History, and a leading minister of the Free Church of Scotland, should have, on such an important occasion, nothing better to say in support or defence of the dogma which he calls "*the foundation of all belief*," than a mere set of variations upon the words—It is, and it is, and it is, and you must believe and say that it is, and must never allow yourself to think that it is not, *because it is!* only *because it is!*

The fair inference from Dr Gibson's language is, that *he identifies his own opinion with Revelation.* To dictate dogma, without appealing to evidence, and without condescending to rational argument upon the evidence, is to assume infallibility. Dr Gibson manifestly assumes either that he himself is infallible, or that he is expressing the opinion of some other (assumed) infallible man or men, when, regardless of

evidence and in defiance of reason, he merely asserts that the Bible is the Word of God. He seems to be quite unconscious of the absurdity of a Protestant Divine making his whole system of doctrine rest upon an *assumption of infallibility*.

It appears too clearly that the faith professed and taught by Dr Gibson, and by that very large class of clerical men whom he may be taken as representing, is of a radically different kind from that which Jesus taught his disciples, when he opened, as it is written, the eyes of their understandings by arousing, instructing, and stimulating them to the consciousness, the exercise, and the enjoyment of their own duty, right, and power to judge and to decide by Reason what they ought to believe, and what they ought not to believe. Having learned of Jesus, they could no longer submit their Reason, as they had for many generations been taught to do, to the traditions and superstitions of their forefathers and of their priests; but burst away from the mental yoke of bondage to these traditions, to these priests, and to the supreme authority of their old written creed or law, with all its sacrifices of blood and burnt flesh, to pacify the wrath and propitiate the favour of a jealous and terrible God, whom the law represented as requiring such sacrifices and delighting in them. We read that the words of Jesus were quick and powerful, and that men were astonished at his doctrine, for that he taught as one *having authority*, appealing with all the force of Truth to the hearts and to the minds of those who understood what he said; and *not as the scribes*, who appealed only to chapter, and verse, and word of their sacred books. Let it be remembered that the Scribes and Pharisees were not ignorant nor wicked men, but were the educated, the respectable, the orthodox, and the synagogue-attending class of their day, who stood up for the authority of "God's Word" *as opposed to Reason*. But the spirit of Jesus

they could neither bind nor subdue, though they could put himself to death; and accordingly we read that those who became disciples of Jesus were *made free* by the power of the Truth—that they passed from darkness to marvellous light—from bondage to liberty—spiritual liberty—mental liberty—the glorious liberty of the children of God, whom they addressed, after the example of their elder brother, as “OUR FATHER,” worshipping Him only, not with the signs and symbols of slavish fear and dread, such as the shedding and sprinkling of blood; but in spirit and in truth, in confidence and love, as became the “*Sons of God.*” There is reason to fear the disciples of men like Dr Gibson can have little of that experience, which the disciples of Jesus appear so fully to have enjoyed.

I have already shown that the *unreasonable faith* of modern popular Christianity is essentially different from the orthodox Christian faith of the true prophets of Protestantism, which was based upon their conviction of the entire harmony and agreement of the Word of God and reason, so that the one voice could not contradict the other, and so that conflict between the two, or subjection of the one to the other, was for them entirely out of the question, *liberation and not submission* being then, as always, the experience of those who listened to the “*still small voice,*” and obeyed the Word of God.

Most of us can now understand that the Reformers made a *critical* mistake, in assuming or fancying, as they manifestly did, that the Bible quite harmonized with Reason, and that there could be no real conflict between them, any more than there could be a real conflict between Reason and the “*Light of Nature,*” which they also recognised as *another* Word of God. But we can also understand that they did not err *culpably*, as we judge their opponents to have erred. They certainly cannot be charged with *wilful blindness*,

nor did they ever proclaim the duty of believing the Bible without investigation, which, on the contrary, they thought it safe to challenge and invite, by formally stating the *rational grounds* on which their own belief was based. That to which their reason submitted was tried, judged, and approved by their reason. Their reason submitted to *itself*, that is to its own interpretation of every Word of God; and all other submission of Reason those noble men and true prophets cast behind them with scorn, as the genuine disciples and followers of "the Prophet of Nazareth" always have done; for, "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is LIBERTY."

The grand distinction, between them and the advocates of the Roman Catholic creed, was this very point. The one party insisted upon the submission of Reason to *that which Reason was forbidden to test and could not approve*. The other party maintained that:—

Confession of Faith, xx. 2—"God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in any thing contrary to his word, or beside it, in matters of faith and worship. So that to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commandments out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience; and *the requiring of an implicit faith, and an absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience, and reason also.*"

Strange, indeed, it is to find, that the old Popish, Jewish, and heathen error, the root of all errors and superstitions,—that Reason is bound to submit to authority not approved by Reason, has grown up again, in a new shape, in the churches which call themselves Protestant.

While such theology is taught and published by doctors and professors, reputed highly orthodox, in high places of the Church, it is perfectly notorious that, from very many pulpits throughout the land,

the same kind of doctrine is preached, which has been well called, "*the Gospel of Unreason.*" My own observation and experience of this preaching are of course local and limited; but, judging from what I read and hear, I infer that it is exceedingly common, and by no means confined to one Church, nor to one part of Great Britain.

It is probable, therefore, that many of my readers may have often heard such specimens as the following, which are supplied by pencil-jottings of sermons, recently taken in the pews by myself and friends in whom I have confidence. They are all genuine and unadorned.

"Every word of this blessed book, brethren, is God's message to us. It is to us individually that Jehovah there speaks." . . . "If we would profit by the Word of God, we must mix faith with the hearing and the reading of it. We must believe that every word of it is true, simply on God's own authority." . . . "God requires of us a child-like unquestioning submission to the divine authority of the Bible, and a willingness to hear the voice of God in all that the Bible says to us." . . . "A sense of God's authority in the Bible, and unquestioning submission to that authority, is the best evidence of true Christianity." . . . "An atheist is one who denies the existence of God; an infidel is one who does not believe that the Bible is the Word of God; and there is not much difference between the two, for he who does not believe that the Bible is God's Word, does not believe in the God of the Bible." . . . "Beware of hardening your hearts against the Word of God, which speaks to us in every sentence of the Bible." . . . "Before a man can resist the authority of God speaking to us in the Bible, there must be a process of hardening the heart, quenching conviction, and self-deception, by false expectations of safety in some other way than that which the Bible reveals."

. . . "I believe that opposition and hatred to the justice of God as revealed in the Bible, the desire to quiet the accusations of a guilty conscience, and to get rid of the fear of punishment which the Bible tells them their sins deserve, are the true reasons why men begin to question the authority of the Bible." . . . "Those who deny this authority would not be convinced, even although the most convincing arguments were presented to them. All their objections and outrageous views have been again and again refuted. It is in the heart and not in the head that their opposition has its seat." . . . "If scenes such as the miraculous deaths of Ananias and Sapphira were to occur in our own day, would they not make *some of us* tremble! Many an awful sight would be seen at our communion tables, if those who come there, and eat and drink damnation, were to be struck down, as Ananias and Sapphira were. Theirs was a miraculous death; and it may appear to some unreasonable, that Peter should thus have had the power to deal so terribly with them. But, my brethren, beware of limiting the power and the sovereignty of the Most High. Though it may be unreasonable, it is none the less true—none the less a miracle. Woe unto the man that disputeth with his Maker—Almighty God!"

I refrain from any particular criticism of these rash assertions and uncharitable thoughts, to which the thinking reader will easily apply most of my remarks on Dr Gibson's lecture; but that inquirers may be enabled to judge of the true name by which to designate the teaching of these too zealous advocates of the Bible, I subjoin the following sentences from very high authorities in the Roman Catholic Church.*

* All quoted, with Latin originals and particular references, in "The Moral Theology of Liguori," by Pascal the Younger, London, 1856, pp. 43, 140, 196, 47.

St Ignatius, the founder of the Jesuits, says in his "Epistle on the Virtue of Obedience," A.D. 1553, "If you would immolate your whole self wholly unto God, you must offer to Him not the bare will merely, but the UNDERSTANDING also." . . . "The noble simplicity of BLIND OBEDIENCE is gone, if in our secret breast we call in question whether that which is commanded be RIGHT OR WRONG. This is what makes it perfect and acceptable to the Lord, that the most excellent and most precious part of man is consecrated to Him, and nothing whatsoever of him kept back for himself."

To show how this principle is applied, Cardinal Wiseman says, in his preface to "The Exercises of St Ignatius :"—"In the Catholic Church no one is ever allowed to trust himself in spiritual matters. The Sovereign Pontiff is obliged to submit himself to the direction of another in whatever concerns his own soul."

To this may be added from the "Exercises :"—"That we may in all things attain the truth, that we may not err in anything, we ought ever to hold it as a fixed principle, that what I see white I believe to be black, if the hierarchical Church so define it."

It may be instructive, as I am quoting, to take a specimen of what these outspoken priests have said about liberty of conscience. Pope Gregory XVI., in an encyclical letter, dated August 1832, says:—"It is from that most fetid fountain, indifferentism, springs the absurd and mistaken notion, or rather raving of madness, that LIBERTY OF CONSCIENCE is to be recognised and vindicated. What has prepared the way for this most pestilential error is, that ample and immoderate LIBERTY OF OPINION which is spreading far and wide, to the ruin of Church and State, though there are some men who, out of most consummate impudence, maintain it is an advantage to religion. This is the aim of that worst of all liberties,

that never-enough-to-be-execrated and detestable LIBERTY OF THE PRESS (*huc spectat deterrima illa ac nunquam satis execranda et detestabilis libertas artis librariæ ad scripta quælibet edenda in vulgus*), which some dare so loudly to demand, and even promote. We are most horribly affrighted (*Perhorrescimus*), venerable brethren, when we see with what monsters of doctrine, with what portents of evil we are overwhelmed (*obruamur*)."

Nearly everything that can be said or thought against this truly horrible presumption, which ignores and hushes up, and utterly disregards or sternly condemns all but its own *one-sided* kind of evidence or argument, will be found, on reflection, easily and equally applicable to such lectures and sermons as those of which I have given specimens.

Is it not clear that this very same old SPIRIT OF POPERY, with only a slight alteration of form and expression, has again got possession of our Protestant pulpits and schools, and that much of the Reformation work will have to be done over again, before we can expect to get rid of its present unwholesome superstitious influence in many branches of the Church?

The root and essence of Popery, and of all false religion, the foundation of all *superstitious* belief, is the submission of man's Reason to some external standard or symbol of "Authority above Reason."

The root and essence of true Christianity, of true Protestantism, and of all true religion, the foundation of all *rational* belief, is the free exercise of Reason, liberation of the intellect, liberty of conscience, private judgment.

These two kinds of religion or belief are as distinctly opposed to each other, as are the two principles or foundations on which they respectively rest; and there is no possibility of reconciling them, nor of finding any tenable middle way or halting place

between the two ; for all things are full of progress, and the increase, as a general rule, is according to the kind. The distinction, moreover, is not *merely* such as there is between two opposite *positions*, but rather such as there is between two opposite *directions*; and no man can be travelling simultaneously towards both the rising and the setting of the equinoctial sun.

“*All worship is idolatry,*” says the great thinker, Thomas Carlyle, the meaning of which appears to be that every man who worships the Infinite or the Unseen, worships his own symbol or conception of the Infinite or the Unseen, which can in no case be what the Infinite and Unseen is, so that the likeness or unlikeness of the symbol—the truth or the falsehood of the conception—can only be relative and comparative terms, no possible symbol or conception being absolutely, perfectly appropriate or true. But he adds,—“*Blameable idolatry is insincere idolatry,*” the meaning of which evidently is that, when doubts have to be stifled, because the only possible solution of them is unbelief,—when the voice of Reason is disregarded, that another voice may be obeyed, which Reason may not test, and therefore cannot approve,—then begins false worship or *blameable idolatry*.

So long as there is no conflict between Reason and Authority,—between the conscience and the Idol, the worship may be reasonable and sincere, the idolatry is not *blameable*, for “where there is no law there can be no transgression of the law.” But, so soon as the conflict arises,—so soon as the antagonism is known and felt by any individual, all true worship of the old symbol or conception is at an end for him. Carelessness, indifference, and mental sloth may, for a time, swell the ranks of neutrality ; but every serious, thoughtful mind is, in such circumstances, unable to rest until it has *made the choice*, by deciding between the rival claims of Reason and Conscience on the one

hand, and of Authority, Tradition, or the Idol, on the other.

Such is the time in which it is our lot to live. The conflict has arisen, and has come to such a height, that it is, now and henceforth, difficult for any thinking man not to know and feel the antagonism between the rival claims for supremacy of Reason and the Bible. Every serious mind is now again being challenged and *compelled* to make a choice, by determining whether the supreme authority of the Bible shall be maintained by the SUBMISSION of Reason, or whether the supreme authority of Reason shall this time again triumph over the worship of an Idol, condemned by Reason, over the asserted and assumed divinity and authority of a book, said to be the Word of God, but with which Reason *does not and cannot* harmonise, as Reason *can and does* harmonise with every true Word of God.

The startling fact, to which men are day by day awakening, is, that this question between Reason and the Bible, which is at present challenging the verdict of every inquiring religious mind, is just the very same old question in a new form, as that which men were invited, and many constrained, to settle for themselves individually, at the time when the first clear light of Christianity shone upon the superstitious gloom of Jewish and heathen traditional beliefs, and again at the time when the dawn of the Protestant Reformation broke forth amidst the darkness of Popish unreasonableness and intellectual submission to authority. The love of truth and of humanity is now again constraining men here and there to stand forth, as of old, against dogmatism and superstition, and against the antiquated and obstructive idea, that those who ought to be the leaders and guides of the people in ascertaining whatever is truest and best, should be bound by oaths and bribed by emoluments to maintain the existing fabric of opinion and custom.

Not from Christianity, nor from Protestantism, have we received "the spirit of bondage again to fear." Why should not our religious teachers be, as our scientific teachers are, free to follow evidence, truth, and fact, wherever these may lead, no matter what existing theory or practice may thus be imperilled or overthrown? Why should they not stir up the gift of God which is in them, as the Apostle Paul says to the young preacher, "for God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind?" Fear cannot enlighten the mind, nor enlarge and strengthen the understanding—cannot elevate the emotions, nor purify the affections—cannot subdue the will, even when it forces compliance or assent—cannot convince the reason, although it may stifle inquiry and discussion. There may be much internal rebellion, even where there is so much external submission and conformity as may be thought necessary for safety or for comfort. Every one knows that this is a common fact of daily observation, not only in religion, but also in politics and in family affairs. But surely it is the very height of folly to imagine that we can propitiate or please the Father of our spirits by being afraid to think. Surely it is gross superstition to be deterred, by dread of His displeasure, from the freest, fullest, upright, serious exercise of reason. "If anything is clear," says an American writer, "it is, that faith is large in proportion as it dares to put things to the proof. Fear and laziness can accept beliefs; only trust and courage will question them. To reject consecrated opinions demands a consecrated mind; at all events, the moving impulse to such rejection is faith—faith in reason; faith in the mind's ability to attain truth; faith in the power of thought—in the priceless worth of knowledge. The great sceptic must be a great believer. None have so magnificently affirmed as those who have audaciously denied; none so devoutly trusted as they who have sturdily protested."

It is not unusual for Bible advocates to declare that they cannot reason at all with those who deny the infallibility and supreme authority of the Bible, because they cannot reason, say they, about that to which reason is bound to submit, and on which all reasoning must be based. To dispute or to deny the supremacy of the Bible is, according to these men, the same thing as to dispute or to deny the supremacy of God. They apparently do not see the obvious fact, that such a declaration is equivalent to a claim of infallibility for themselves or for their own opinion that the Bible is infallible : or else they would never presume to say, that to contend against their opinion about a book is to contend against God. Can they not understand that, even though their assertion about the Bible were clearly and unmistakably set forth in the Bible itself, which, however, *it assuredly is not*, it would still be inexcusably absurd to maintain, that doubt or distrust of God is shown by those who express their doubt or distrust of any of the matter recorded in the Bible by the hands of men ? It seems almost incredible that any intelligent mind should fail to perceive the obvious, wide, and essential distinction between these two kinds of doubt or distrust ; but yet it is too well known to need proof, that many of our teachers think, or at least say, that these two different things are the same, and both alike criminal. Who has not heard or read their stupid declarations, that to trace and exhibit the various marks of human ignorance, error, and imperfection, which abound in the Bible as in other ancient books, is God-dishonouring blasphemy, which He will surely punish ! No less weak and absurd would it be for any free-thinking man to be cowed into submission, or even into deference, by such unreasonable and presumptuous assertions as these, than it would be for an educated European to be similarly influenced by the candid and common

assertion of an orthodox Chinese, expressing his entire confidence in the certainty and truth of his traditional belief, that the people, customs, and opinions of the "*Celestial Empire*" are incomparably superior to all others, and that all men of the European persuasion are "*outside barbarians and devils.*"

What, then, it is asked, is the use of the Bible? Why should it not be utterly abolished? If it is not infallible, it is not to be trusted; and if it is not to be trusted, it can hardly fail to mislead; therefore, it ought to be destroyed. Freethinkers are often told that, if they would be consistent, they should argue thus, and should set the example by throwing their own Bibles in the fire. I myself have been thus addressed by "orthodox" clergymen, and have been misrepresented by others as if I argued thus. It might suffice to reply that the same argument, if sound, would condemn all the treasures of literature to the flames. The Bible is not infallible; therefore, it ought to be destroyed. No other book is infallible; therefore, all other books ought to be burnt. From Homer to Tennyson, from Herodotus to Froude, from Plato to Mill, from Aristotle to Huxley, from Zoroaster to Dr Cumming,—poets, historians, philosophers, men of science, and divines have all been fallible, and often in error, whatever pretensions to the contrary may have been set up by themselves or by their admirers; therefore, destroy the works of them all, so that none may henceforth be misled thereby! Obliterate all the records of the past, so that we and our children may be free from the dangerous influence of past delusions and mistakes; because in none of these records can be found perfection or infallibility.

The argument thus refutes itself, and the refutation applies especially to the Bible. Books, old or new, are valuable and useful just in proportion as they

enable the student to profit by the varied experience, culture, and progress, and even by the errors and failures of other men. Modern thought and education, from the village school to the highest walks of learning, are the still progressive fruits of accumulated ages; and books have, ever since their first employment, been the safest and most effectual vehicle for the transmission and propagation thereof from one age to another.

But let authority set the seal of assumed infallibility upon any one book, and its usefulness will be at once greatly impaired, if not entirely destroyed. Instead of a help, it will soon become a hindrance, and so it is now with the Bible. By the dogmatic ascription of infallibility and supreme authority, equally and indiscriminately, to the whole of its contents, it has come to be regarded through a mystic veil or cloud of superstition. The intrinsic, direct, and self-evident inspiration of some portions has been degraded and obscured, by placing these on the same level with those of an entirely different and even opposite character; the inspiration of the latter being assumed and asserted to be no less an authoritative fact, though neither self-evident, intrinsic, nor direct, as judged by the free-thinking mind. The undeniable majesty, truth, and beauty of very many passages are, by this arbitrary interposition of traditional dogma, confounded by reduction to equality with the weakness, meanness, or repulsiveness of others, which, but for such interposition, reason would now universally judge to be evil or incredible. The intellect and moral conscience of men are stunted, distorted, and hindered in their growth, by external authority training and constraining one faculty of the mind to usurp the province of another—by subjecting reason to the religious sentiment—or, in other words, by cultivating superstition.

The great value, interest, and use of the Bible, far

from being negated or even impaired, are, in fact, only discovered or vastly enlarged, when it is approached as a venerable record of human thought, experience, trial, and progress—the divinely appointed education of mankind. The study of past errors, faults, and failures is not less useful nor less instructive than that of past wisdom, worth, and success. Both alike are “profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness;”—“for WHATSOEVER THINGS WERE WRITTEN AFORE-TIME were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope” of better times to come for us and for humanity.

