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THE  
BIBLIOTHECA SACRA.

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ARTICLE I.

CONSTRUCTIVE EXEGESIS.

BY WILLIAM ARNOLD STEVENS, PROFESSOR OF NEW TESTAMENT EXEGESIS,  
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EXEGESIS in its broadest sense includes the whole function of interpretation as employed upon the Holy Scriptures. The interpreter acts as the mediator between mind and mind in the transmission of thought. Taken at the highest, his office is that of the prophet, who receives directly the thought of God and communicates it to man. In this Article, however, exegesis will be considered simply as employed in *understanding* the Scriptures, leaving out of view the methods by which its results are to be made available for the use or advantage of others. As thus employed it aims to elicit from a given passage or book the whole thought and purpose of the writer.

Schleiermacher, indeed, included interpretation as a whole under the definition *die Kunst des Verstehens*, "the art of understanding." Inadequate as the definition is, it undoubtedly penetrates to what is fundamental. An art, truly, and apt in this age of much reading to lag behind in the so-called progress of the arts! The searching challenge of Philip the Evangelist, "Understandest thou what thou readest?" (*γινώσκεις ἃ ἀναγινώσκεις*; the felicitous parano-masia of the Greek being perhaps untranslatable) still goes to the heart of the matter, and needs fresh and constant

iteration, with more than Socratic pertinacity, in the ear of every student of the Bible.

In what sense, or to what extent, is exegesis, thus considered, *constructive*? The question concerns the order and the aim of the entire exegetic process. In raising, and in attempting to answer, this inquiry, I would address the student, as well as the professional expounder of the Bible — the reader, as well as the writer, of commentaries. We are at present witnessing a remarkable revival of biblical studies; the press is teeming with commentaries. The appearance of the Anglo-American Revised New Testament has awakened a fresh general interest in the problems and principles that specially concern the exegete. Surely, there was never more need that biblical interpretation should subject its methods to critical inquiry, ground its work upon broad philosophical principles, and obtain the clearest possible conception of its own ideal. Any real progress will much depend upon its keeping steadily in view the true goal of its course in order to press thitherward with undiverted energies. My main object in this Article is to show that in the exegetic process the constructive idea should dominate throughout. Precisely what is meant by constructive — should any ambiguity attach to the term in this connection — will very soon appear.

Let us hasten to admit that in no field of inquiry is minute criticism and analysis more necessary, in none has it been more productive. The tracing of etymologies, the discrimination of synonymes, analysis of grammatical forms and functions to the last degree of minuteness, have breathed new life into many a dead form of ancient speech, and recovered to biblical science many a long lost, but germinant and fruitful fact. Kühner's analysis of the sentence, which Professor Greene has elaborated to still greater perfection, and has introduced to the familiar acquaintance of American students, has contributed not a little to lucid exegesis. Witness also the value of a single historical investigation, as given in *The Voyage and Shipwreck of St. Paul*, by

James Smith, of Jordanhill. Still, there is a line to be drawn between studies that are auxiliary to exegesis and exegesis itself. History, philology, archaeology, criticism — these are indispensable to the interpreter, and the interpreter to them. Without them he has neither tools nor materials; they, in turn, can but grope blindly among the archives of the past without the *organon* which it is the office of interpretation to furnish. Let us now consider

#### THE FIRST STAGE OF THE EXEGETIC PROCESS.

I. *Exegesis begins with Particulars; namely, with the Examination of Words and Phrases.* — Its method from the very outset is, and must be, scientific. It grounds all its work upon the minutest analysis of phenomena. The elements of expression are scrutinized in the light of the widest inductive research. Exegesis first applies itself to ascertain, with the aid of lexicography and grammar, the meanings of words and their relations in the sentence. It seeks for sharply-defined terms and vivid impressions of single thoughts. The meaning of every particle, even of each component factor of it that *had* a meaning, is indispensable to the success of the investigation. No atom or fibre of the discourse, provided the atom or the fibre were still living, can be allowed to escape the interpreter's scrutiny. He is not concerned with words as relics, with their historical associations or transformations as such, but with that which they signified to him who spoke them. To penetrate to the life of the word and of the sentence, — to their signification at the time when they were uttered, — this is his first and indispensable task. Hence he accepts in its literal truth the well-known dictum of Melancthon: "Scripturam non posse intelligi theologice, nisi antea sit intellectum grammaticæ."

With this first stage of the exegetical process, — which perhaps answers to *grammatical exegesis*, in the larger sense of the term, — many seem to stop, or at least to consider their main task accomplished. The reasons are various. One is, that, though but a first step, it is

one. It is a task requiring large knowledge, acute observation, laborious and widely-extended inductive research. Besides, it is, in the very nature of the case, accompanied by exegetic processes of a higher order, which impart a certain appearance of completeness to the result. Bishop Ellicott, in his commentaries on the Epistles of Paul, has for the most part restricted himself to this stage of the work. These commentaries testify to the possibilities of the grammatical process rigorously applied, and by the hand of a master. The author, it seems to me, goes beyond the proper province of a commentator in incorporating into his notes so much grammatical and lexical material not needed for the elucidation of the passage in hand. As it is, suitable indexes would have made this material far more useful to the New Testament student.

Another reason why exegesis is often confined to the explanation of single words and sentences is to be found in the homiletical motive with which the Scriptures are studied, taken in connection with the habit of preaching from single verses. Broad, deep knowledge of the Bible is not to be attained by studying texts and difficult passages. Still, a third reason may be found in the verse-arrangement that has so long prevailed in our modern Bibles -- the printing of each verse as if it were a separate paragraph. The revisers of the New Version rightly speak of it in their preface as interposing "serious obstacles to the right understanding of the Holy Scriptures." Happily they also set the example of a return to the earlier and better method of printing in longer paragraphs. Notwithstanding all that has said upon the subject, the great majority of readers have but a slight apprehension of the mischievous effect of the prevalent method of printing. How it tends to obscure the sense of a passage may be seen by comparing the first twelve verses of the second chapter of Philipians with the original. A curious instance of the obliteration of an important historical transition may be found in Mark iii. 19. In many of the best editions of the Oxford Bible it reads, with a period before and after: "And Judas Iscariot which also betrayed him; and they went into an

house." Examining the whole passage we see that the first half of the verse forms the close of Mark's account of the appointment of the twelve; the latter half, "and they went into an house," begins his account of the memorable warning given to the scribes against incurring the guilt of an eternal sin. It took place probably several months after the appointment of the twelve, certainly after an extended preaching tour in Galilee had intervened.

Nor is it merely the unlearned reader who is thus misled. What exegete has arisen on American soil of greater learning than Joseph Addison Alexander? Yet in his Commentary on Mark—a work whose value it would be superfluous to endorse here—we find the two clauses of the above-mentioned verse explained as if forming integral parts of the same section; an oversight on the part of the author that we can scarcely account for, except by referring it to the long-continued habit of seeing and reading them together.

Linguistic learning and tastes predispose an exegete to expend disproportionate time upon the meaning of a single word,—disproportionate, I mean, so far as such investigation is made part of the exegetic process. For it is apt to become a study of the linguistic form rather than of the actual thought for which it stands, or it becomes an inquiry into a fact for its own sake, and thus diverts the attention of the interpreter from more difficult and important problems. Not that exegesis can make too much use of etymology, lexicography, or archaeology; but these are sciences in their own right, they are not exegesis, and for its purpose are only servitors and auxiliaries. Hence the significance of the old maxim of law, *Qui haeret in litera haeret in cortice*, "he who considers merely the letter of an instrument, goes but skin-deep into its meaning"; or, as again paraphrased by Broom, "He who too minutely regards the form of expression, takes but a superficial, and therefore probably an erroneous, view of the meaning of an instrument."

Science, as well as philosophy, is impatient of *dissecta membra*. Whatever be the concrete object presented to its

contemplation, it seeks to bring separate parts into their proper order, and to conceive of the object as a whole. Now the objects which are presented to the contemplation of exegetical science are the most perfect products of the mind,—products which must therefore exhibit complexity and unity in the highest degree. “You will allow,” says Plato, “that every discourse ought to be a living creature, having its own body and head and feet.” That is, in discourse properly so called the thought to be conveyed must be somewhat highly organized, and the structure of the discourse must have a corresponding degree of organic completeness. The first and chief task of the speaker, or the writer is thus to give organic form to his thought. He labors to combine, construct, create. This creative or constructive process takes place within his own mind. Perfection there assures perfection in expression. Now, the interpreter aims to follow the workings of the writer’s mind; he thinks his thoughts after him; his sympathy with the writer must be such as to enable him to reproduce in great measure the original constructive process. Hence, the description of particulars, and the grammatical analysis which have been spoken of above, only constitute a preparation for the most important part of his work. These particulars he must construct anew in terms furnished by his own thinking and experience, till the whole thought and purpose of the writer have taken living form in his own soul.

We may derive instruction from the analogous methods of natural science; methods emphasized by the example and the teaching of the great masters in that realm. The following anecdote told by a friend of Agassiz, is in illustration: “Some thirty-five years ago, at a meeting of a literary and scientific club of which I happened to be a member, a discussion sprang up concerning Dr. Hitchcock’s book on bird-tracks, and plates were exhibited representing his geological discoveries. After much time had been consumed in describing the bird-tracks as isolated phenomena, and in lavishing compliments on Dr. Hitchcock, a man suddenly rose who in

five minutes dominated the whole assembly. He was, he said, much interested in the specimens before them, and he would add that he thought highly of Dr. Hitchcock's book as far as it accurately described the curious and interesting facts he had unearthed; but, he added, the defect in Dr. Hitchcock's volume is this, that 'it is *dees-creep-teeve* and not *com-par-a-teeve*.' It was evident throughout that the native language of the critic was French, and that he found some difficulty in forcing his thoughts into English words; but I never can forget the intense emphasis he put on the words descriptive and comparative; by this emphasis flashing into the minds of the whole company, the difference between an enumeration of strange unexplained facts, and the same facts as interpreted and put into relation with other facts more generally known. . . . The critic was of course Agassiz."<sup>1</sup> The exegete has still much to learn from the naturalist if he will not lose himself and his aim in the contemplation of particulars. "There are many royal men," says Plato in the *Phaedrus*, discussing studies that we may rank under the same general head as interpretation, "and yet we are still sadly in the dark; . . . if I find any man who is able to see unity and plurality in nature, him I follow, and walk in his steps as if he were a God."

It is already plain what a scientific method enjoins upon us. In the interpretation of a book we must hasten forward to the contemplation of that order which belongs to it as a whole. Its words, phrases, and thoughts cannot be apprehended separately, but only as constituent elements of an organic product. From the very first, then, multiplicity is to be thought into unity. Far more must this be our method when we come to that book which in respect to its unity and plurality of structure stands unique in literature. In the divine *λόγια* we shall be led on to the contemplation of the *λόγος* — in the successive communications through inspired men during a course of sixteen centuries we shall perceive ourselves to be reading one inseparable record and message of a divinely-

<sup>1</sup> Harper's Magazine, June 1879.



wrought deliverance. But how is our progress to this deeper and broader understanding of the Scriptures conditioned? In vindicating the constructive idea as that which is fundamental and essential in their interpretation, we are brought to consider the

#### SECOND STAGE OF THE EXEGETIC PROCESS.

II. *To reproduce Discourse in its Continuity.*—The organic order which we are now and first to seek is that by virtue of which the thoughts of the writer assume a consecutive coherence. In discourse nothing is isolated; there must be coherence; and the coherence is that of a series, not that of a system. Homer describes the speech that falls from the lips of Menelaus as something woven. The vitality of discourse depends on its continuity. The nervous cord itself is not more sensitive to separation. Sever it, and the flow of life ceases. No conception is more frequently misleading than that which views discourse as the stringing together of a series of pictures; an analogy obvious enough in some aspects, but conveying no hint of that continuous energy by virtue of which alone speech achieves its consummate function. It is rather a melody; you must perceive the notes, not only one by one and in due succession, but in a succession sufficiently rapid, or else the melody vanishes.

Lessing has shown, in his *Laocoon*, the essential characteristic of discourse as a medium of expression, — how it is a series of symbols presented in succession, contrasted with plastic art, which presents them side by side — how the best poetry instinctively recognizes this characteristic. Homer, for instance, does not paint the shield of Achilles as finished, but as in process of creation. “When he wants us to see the chariot of Juno, Hebe must put it together, piece by piece, before our eyes.” Discourse presents ideas in signs addressed to the ear; its order is primarily consecutive, not simultaneous. This is a fact that conditions the processes not only of the poet and the orator, but of the interpreter as well. The unity which he seeks first to repro-

duce to himself is the unity of discourse as such. For it is the inevitable defect of the written page that it can express but imperfectly the connections of thought. Imperfect at best is articulate speech and all the tones and the mimicry of the human voice; far more imperfect are the written symbols, by which the former are suggested, not represented. Here, in a peculiar sense, it is the letter (*γράμμα*, that which is written) that killeth. The writer seeks to write his thought as he would have it heard; his success can never be more than approximate. Exegesis must first transform written speech into oral speech; it must hear it with its own ear; the written page must somehow become a phonograph under its gaze, a speaking page, reproducing to its far-hearing sense the tones that first sounded in the soul of the speaker or writer.

Above all must the New Testament be so interpreted. There are written books and spoken books. The jurist scrutinizes the will, the statute, or the treaty that lies before him as addressed to the eye, rather than to the ear. Leaving out of view the few specimens of oratory proper and the relics of folk poetry,—such, for instance, as have come down to us in the poems of Homer and the Lay of the Niebelungs,—the world's classics are for the most part studied compositions of the solitary pen. The *Novum Organum*, the *Paradise Lost*, the *Decline and Fall*, conform to the laws of written speech; they are not read best aloud; they are the discourse of habitual writers to habitual readers. With the New Testament it is strikingly different. The greater part of this book is a record of spoken thought—of discourse fresh from the lips, warm from the quick-beating hearts of men who are speaking to men face to face. The first three Gospels are the fresh echoes of the very preaching of the apostolic twelve. Paul's Epistles show equally plain traces of the manner of their composition; they reflect his daily discourse. They were written down by an amanuensis, while the ardent apostle was addressing the distant audience that his spirit beheld and longed for. He knew, as he dictated

them that they were to be read aloud, that most of his readers were to hear them. Thus the interpreter is ever to remember that such writings are not to be interpreted as if they were the systematized sections and chapters of a textbook, or the cold artificialisms of a tedious, pedantic exactitude. The vital current in them is continuous and free; thought and feeling flow without break from the beginning to the end of each book.

In books on hermeneutics we are amply furnished with directions as to this part of our task, under the head of logical interpretation. They are necessarily mechanical, but not useless. To discuss these rules is not my purpose, nor even to urge their patient study and application. He will spare no pains of this sort who loves his task and who comprehends its difficulty. To recover the consecutive coherence of those strains of discourse,—the unique product of minds in the very highest state of creative activity,—the rhythmic movement, the turns and transitions of thought, their digressions and apparent breaks,—to feel the emotions, impulses, and passions with which they vibrate, to trace in them the expression of will and character, as well as thought—all this is more than mere labor or learning can achieve; it requires also the insight, the skill, the sympathetic and mirror-like soul of genius itself.

Let me call attention here to one canon not made sufficiently prominent as it seems to me, by writers on interpretation, and too much disregarded by expositors. It is this: "The phrase or clause should often be taken as the unit of thought, rather than the single terms of which it is composed." Due regard to this will not only shorten the way from the grammatical to a broader exegesis, it will also facilitate correct apprehension of the scope of a passage, and even the proper interpretation of the terms themselves. Instances of such phrases will occur to every student of the Scriptures: e.g. in Acts ix. 14, *τοὺς ἐπικαλουμένους τὸ ὄνομα τοῦτο*, "to call on the name of," an Old Testament phrase applied to the worshipping of God, and familiar to Jewish

ears as a glance at the Concordance of the Septuagint shows, is simply to be taken as a whole in that well-known signification. In Romans i. 17, *ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν*, "from faith to faith," I cannot but think it an error on the part of the majority of recent expositors (see Meyer, Alford, Grimm, Philippi, Godet), to interpret the expression as two phrases separately modifying the predicate. The use of *ἐκ* and *εἰς* for the purpose of forming a single phrase is sufficiently frequent to furnish at least a presumption that this is the case here, the reference being either to the progressive nature of faith (as Calvin), or to the fact that the salvation spoken of is entirely of faith (as Hodge, Kendrick). A distinguished writer has remarked on the importance of this canon in legal hermeneutics: "The longer I study the subject, the more I am impressed with the truth that the sentence or phrase is usually the unit of interpretation, and that false constructions oftener grow out of the attempt to decide a difficult question by the meaning of a single word taken by itself than from any other cause."<sup>1</sup>

A word, finally, upon another point, before we pass to the next and, for the purpose of this paper, the most important phase of our subject. It is in recombining discourse according to its consecutive unity that we may detect most certainly the marks of the writer's individuality. In words, phrases, and even sentences, we deal largely with the product of the many. It is the community, the age, that puts its stamp upon these, and makes them the current coin of thought. The writer's vocabulary and commonplaces, though of his selection, are in the slightest sense his. He not only adopts, consciously and unconsciously, already existing forms of speech, but is determined not a little by them as regards his conceptions and modes of thought. It is the order of presentation and the larger relations of his discourse that disclose most perfectly his personal creative activity. To discover what is on the one hand the product of the occasion and the individual, and on the other of the age and the

<sup>1</sup> Prof. W. G. Hammond in Lieber's *Legal and Political Hermeneutics*, p. 290.

community, is now recognized as one of the most necessary, and at the same time most difficult, tasks that criticism and theology have assigned to New Testament exegesis. The style of the New Testament writers has received as yet comparatively little attention. In this interest the Septuagint is yet to be thoroughly explored, together with the other remains of Hellenic and Hellenistic Greek; while the researches of Schöttgen, Delitzsch, Wünsche, and others into rabbinic literature will furnish material hardly less useful.

#### THE FINAL STAGE OF THE EXEGETIC PROCESS.

III. The task of exegesis, finally, is to *reproduce the organic unity of discourse*. — It is the inner order now that we seek, not the order that the thought has been constrained to assume under the conditions imposed by the very nature of discourse. The unity of discourse that we have just been considering is the unity of a series, the coherence of its thoughts in the order of their presentation. As we have just seen, it is necessary to restore that living coherence, to recombine the elements of the series until the whole has produced a single collective impression. On reflection, however, we find still another thought-arrangement necessary. The train of images and ideas has passed in order before the mental vision; we may compare it to an army filing by in single column; the same army in the order of its organization will present a different array. So the order of discourse is by no means the organic order of the thoughts that compose it.

To reproduce this organic order is evidently the last and highest function of exegesis. It is to obtain a clear conception of that structural unity of thought and purpose by virtue of which its several ideas and parts constituted in the mind of the writer an organic whole. In this process we have as a leading question from first to last: What is the central theme, or in other words, what is the fundamental intention of the writer? For it is this that furnishes the key to the constructive problem. It is not itself the solution of

the whole recorded

the problem ; the problem is to bring together in their true, namely, their original inner order the elements upon the separate significance of which it was the business of grammatical exegesis to pronounce. The fundamental formative thought is the original draught of the architect, enabling us to reconstruct with success.

Some fine examples of constructive exposition are presented to us in Hengstenberg's Commentary on the Psalms. Professor Godet has written his Commentary on Luke with this aim, one of the best products of the method. We cannot, of course, expect to find in every book of the New Testament the same unity as is displayed in a poem or an argumentative oration ; there is not perhaps in every case a single constructive idea, as Lange, for instance, maintains, is to be found in each of Paul's Epistles. At least we are not allowed to assume it *a priori*. The spontaneous variety of the mind is not to be so fettered. Yet the exegete cannot rest satisfied with his investigations until they have disclosed the leading thought or purpose of the writer, and the organic relations sustained thereto by the several component parts of the work.

Let me call the reader's attention to a passage in Mark, the book which is to be the subject of the International Sunday-school Lessons throughout the year 1882. It includes thirty-four verses, from Mark ii. 1 to iii. 6. The passage strikingly illustrates, if I mistake not, that inner unity which we have been considering. There are five distinct sections which may be entitled as follows: 1. Healing of a Paralytic ; 2. Call of Matthew ; 3. Reply concerning Fasting ; 4. the Grain plucked on the Sabbath ; 5. Healing of the Withered Hand.

At first glance these sections seem to have no close connection. Nearer scrutiny reveals a sequence which is clearly neither accidental, nor due merely to the fact of their original chronological order. They sketch the rapidly developing hostility of the pharisaic hierarchy to Christ during the few months that immediately preceded the organization of the apostolate on the Mount of Beatitudes. At the healing of the paralytic our Lord for the first time in the narrative

is brought into open collision with the Scribes and Pharisees; his answer to their challenge, accompanied by the deed of healing, if it did not silence them, at least compelled their reluctant applause. In the second of the above sections we find their hostility raised to a higher pitch by the admission of a hated publican into the circle of Christ's immediate followers. In the third, the question at issue is that of fasting—a question that they deemed of vital importance, and inferior only to that of the Sabbath. In the fourth, Christ confronts them for the first time upon the Sabbath question, that which the scribes naturally made the prominent issue during this stage of Christ's ministry. Charged with a technical infraction of the law in the person of his disciples, he rests his defence on the great truth of his own Messianic lordship over man and the Sabbath. In the fifth section the "chapter" (which these thirty-four verses ought properly to form) closes and culminates. Christ's answer, appealing as it did to the profoundest ethical consciousness of his hearers, and rendered more majestic by the act of supernatural power that followed, silenced his antagonists, and drove them from the hardly contested field. It was the unanswerable answer. "And the Pharisees went out, and straightway with the Herodians took counsel against him how they might destroy him." Here occurs the first mention by this evangelist of that conspiracy which finally resulted in the Redeemer's death. It is introduced as the final act, the *denouement*, as it were, of a tersely outlined drama that almost anticipates the history of the passion week. The passage is one of very great importance in the interpretation of the whole gospel history. The under-running thought and purpose of the framer of the narrative can hardly be mistaken. Yet this Gospel of Mark is the book which a distinguished authority has recently pronounced "disproportionate, inartistic, and uncouth; scarcely, indeed, to be called a book, but rather a collection of anecdotes."<sup>1</sup>

Various portions of this Gospel reveal alike the writer's

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Edwin A. Abbott in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Art. "Gospels."

purpose and his skill. Equally distinct traces of a designed structural arrangement appear in the other historical books of the New Testament, in spite of the apparent disconnection of their parts. The great dogmatic works of the Middle Ages have been styled "cathedrals of thought." The phrase is doubtless intended to describe their amplitude of treatment, as well as the massive, enduring strength of their logic. The New Testament books, whether we regard their central aim or their structural harmonies, may with equal aptness be styled temples of divine thought. Let us reverently study not only the truths they enshrine, but the divine adjustments of form by which revelation has been made communicable to man in its completeness and harmony.

It is especially the historical books of the Bible that have suffered from neglect of the true exegetical method. So long ago as 1852 this was pointed out by Baumgarten with respect to the Book of Acts—the neglect of the systematic study of its inner connections. "The most obvious testimony to this neglect," he says, "is the confession which the theological science of our own times has made with respect to the Acts of the Apostles, of which it avows its inability to point out the plan and the object," that it has been reserved for modern times to become conscious of the need of a clear and definite insight into the inner structure and composition of this book. Baumgarten's work was primarily designed to prepare the way for a comprehensive exposition of that portion of New Testament history, and to rescue it from the fragmentary handling to which it had hitherto been exposed.

I have already referred to the analogous methods of science. The scientific inquirer seeks for typical forms, laws of combination and development, distinct movements of historical advance and expansion. His constant impulse is towards those larger unities that disclose the divine thought in its fullest variety, manifoldness, and harmony. It will not be denied that the same essential principles prevail in exegetical, as in all truly scientific method. The chief ob-



stacle to their successful application is not always clearly apprehended. In nature the interpreter has before him the actual forms; in the written page the interpreter has before him only a collection of symbols. These will not furnish the concrete realities which the constructive process requires any more than the architect's drawings and specifications will provide the materials for the construction of the cathedral or temple. It is from the entities that these represent that we are to rear, each in the spaces of his own thought, the temple structures of divine discourse; and as the work goes on, without sound of hammer or of ax or of any tool of iron, let us trust that the Spirit of God may inform these structures into living temples, whose walls shall resound forever with celestial symphonies.

The demand of constructive exegesis — the demand that the contents of a work shall be understood in their inner unity — is not satisfied by ascertaining its leading thoughts, or by drawing up an analysis of its contents. It is rather by means of the theme, or leading thought, that it traces and retraces in detail the unfolding purpose of the writer, and comprehends the adjustment and adaptations by which that purpose is achieved. Indeed, it is only by attending closely to the general aim of a discourse that its individual parts can be correctly or adequately interpreted; and while exegesis begins with the investigation of single phenomena, in order thereby to attain to the comprehension of their unity, it is after all the unifying principle itself that affords a means of verifying the correctness of the earlier process.

It is most of all in these latter stages of the exegete's work, — namely, in testing and verifying his results, — that the principle for which I contend comes most prominently into view. The principle is, that in exegesis the constructive aim should dominate the entire plan of work. Keen perception of facts, vivid apprehension of single thoughts, must be secondary to the discernment of their inner affinities and relations to the general scope of the author's work. The prime and indispensable requisite is an adequate and clear

conception of the fundamental theme; and in the exegete's work considered as a whole all study of details is rigidly to be subordinated to the attainment of such a conception.

I would not be understood as urging attention to a method of exegesis, but rather to the principles that underlie all exegesis rightly and broadly considered. Nor would I insist on the term "constructive," except for the purpose of better describing the actual process by which alone exegesis can hope to attain its ideal or accomplish its best results. I recall here the words of a writer upon art, criticising, some years ago, the method of instruction then pursued in the South Kensington School of Design: "It disregards," says the writer, "the subordination of detail to the action and the larger masses. . . . The feeling," he adds, "which lay at the root of their work was, get the details right, and the masses must be right — a superficial maxim, and one that is invariably falsified by practice; for no one does ever get the details absolutely right, and the sum of the errors is worse than any possible error in the larger way of working."

As we look out upon the widening horizon of historical and philological inquiry, as we at the same time discern the quickening consciousness of the church of Christ touching the vital questions of the trustworthiness and the inspiration of the historical writings of the Bible, it becomes manifest how pressing is the demand of the time for an exegesis such as it has been my object briefly to delineate — an exegesis rigorously scientific in its method, and equally scientific in its scope and comprehension — an exegesis that shall push steadily forward on the long path that it is still to hew out for itself toward its distant goal. Perhaps no one has recognized this demand more clearly than the lamented Hofmann of Erlangen, especially as regards the more comprehensive exposition of the Scriptures. It is indicated in the title of his great work, left incomplete at his death: "Die heilige Schrift des neuen Testaments zusammenhangend untersucht" — an invaluable bequest to biblical science, notwithstanding its serious defects, especially as a philological commentary.

The works of Baumgarten and Godet have already been spoken of. Similarly valuable, though in another sort, are Bernard's *Progress of Doctrine in the New Testament*, and R. Payne Smith's *Prophecy a Preparation for Christ*. The general movement towards a more comprehensive exegesis of the New Testament has followed two chief directions. On the one hand, it has aimed at the systematic exposition of the historical contents of the Gospels; these studies now constitute a theological *cursus* by themselves, with a rapidly enlarging body of literature, to which Ebrard, Lange, Greswell, our own Norton, and others have made such splendid contributions. On the other hand, it aims at a comprehensive genetic presentation of the doctrines of the New Testament in their historical unity — a line of inquiry already somewhat fruitful, but promising results of still greater value to biblical science.

To sum up all in one word, let us penetrate beneath mere phenomena and mechanism, and discern powers. "Living is the word of God and powerful" (Heb. iv. 12) says the divine word of itself. He who detects the working of forces will inevitably be led to work constructively in reaching his conception of their products. The sublimest harmonies of the material universe have been disclosing themselves to modern science under the concept of force. Long before modern science David had a poet's glimpse of the same truth, when he saw the sun "coming as a bridegroom out of his chamber, and rejoicing as a strong man to run a race." Essentially the same conception is embodied in the title "Celestial Physics," that Kepler gave to one of his astronomical treatises. So Goethe not only sees, but feels and hears the resistless approach of the dawn: <sup>1</sup>

"Sounding loud to spirit-hearing,  
See the new-born Day appearing!  
Rocky portals jarring shatter;  
Phoebus' wheels in rolling clatter;  
With a crash the Light draws near."

But the Christian revelation did not find expression in the

<sup>1</sup> Faust, Second Part, Bayard Taylor's translation.

working of external forces. The sphere in which its communication took place was the human soul—a sphere of being where inconceivably mighty energies are in activity, and which constitutes a universe of phenomena even more varied and complex than those of external nature. In the forms of that inner world were disclosed the truths of revelation—that law of Jehovah to which David, in the Psalm quoted above, ascribes a perfection beyond that of the visible heavens. If the Bible be indeed the Word, and not merely the words of God,—a continuous discourse held with the soul of man through sixteen centuries,—it has a cosmic harmony of its own sublimer to the thoughtful mind than that of the stellar universe. Who shall be the Kepler to interpret the dynamics of this cosmos—to demonstrate the divine wisdom as exhibited in the adjustment of those forces whose resultant is revelation, the “living and powerful” word? Such an one will impart a fresh and deeper meaning to the great astronomer’s hallelujah after the discovery of his third law of the planetary motions: “Father of the world, what moved thee thus to exalt a poor weak little creature of earth so high that he stands in light a far-ruling king, almost a god? For he thinks thy thoughts after thee.”

Various corollaries from the principles set forth in the preceding pages will suggest themselves to those who are engaged in exegetical study or instruction. With the mention of three I will bring the discussion to a close.

First, the Scriptures should be read consecutively more than it is now the fashion to do, and also in large portions at a time. The preacher must ponder his one text; the exegete spend weeks of critical study upon a single paragraph; a single chapter may be the soul’s food for many a devotional hour, and lift it to the seventh heaven of rapture; but this is not the way to know the Bible. We must abandon piecemeal reading, surrender ourselves to the Bible in the spirit of which Mrs. Browning speaks:

“Gloriously forget ourselves, and plunge,  
Soul-forward, headlong into a book’s profound,  
Impassioned with its beauty.”

Chrysostom is said to have had Romans read aloud to him twice a week; we read at the most a chapter at a sitting; yet the whole Gospel of Mark can be deliberately read aloud in two hours, the prophecy of Habakkuk in twenty minutes. Kinglake, in his *History of the Crimean War*, refers to the necessity of a consecutive, continuous reading in the investigation of historical documents. "It may seem strange," he says, "but the truth is, that the general scope of a lengthened official correspondence is not to be gathered by merely learning at intervals the import of each dispatch." If we hope to eradicate habits of feeble, intermittent attention and disjointed thinking, if students of the Bible are to be less satisfied with a scrap-book knowledge of its contents and the necessarily superficial or distorted view of its teachings that flourishes in such a soil, there is here pointed out at least one remedial method.

Secondly, with the majority of biblical students their exegetical work should be largely and systematically expended upon an English version. Far be it from the writer to depreciate the study of the original. But the great body of pastors, and also of laymen, who desire to search the Scriptures for themselves, are conscious of a painfully inadequate knowledge of Hebrew and Greek, or, with the best linguistic training, have but limited leisure for independent exegetical study. What is to be done? Put aside the original? No; but, along with a thorough grammatical scrutiny of special passages in the Greek and Hebrew, let them work on a larger plan with an English version. Many have doubtless been unconsciously deterred from continuous systematic study of the Scriptures by the notion that exegesis, properly so called, begins and ends with the original text. On the contrary, there is only here and there a scholar who can apprehend the drift and logical connection of a series of chapters without resorting to the repeated reading of a translation. In order to obtain a single, collective impression, his mind must not be diverted by attention to peculiarities of form or idiom; he must read it in that language in which he can also think.

But it is not the object of this Article to discuss this important practical subject. I would only urge the more general extension of rigorous exegetical methods to the study of our English Bible.

A third corollary concerns the question of inspiration. The theology of our day finds itself persistently met by the demand for a theory of inspiration that shall draw a clearer line of demarcation between the human and the divine in the Scripture, that shall serve as a rule by which to eliminate the subjective, the relative, the transitory, and arrive by a short method at the absolute objective truth of revelation, whether considered as history or as doctrine. It is plain, from the foregoing discussion, that this demand is premature. Of the inspiration of the Bible as a book the Bible itself, as might be expected, says comparatively little. When we ask what in it is the product of a direct, personal, supernatural agency of the Divine Spirit—that question, so far as concerns a scientifically formulated theory, must wait long for an answer. It is in the organic unity of the Bible that the clearest manifestations and proofs of inspiration are to be discerned. Of the fact of such a unity we are not without proofs, though on the part of most believers they are rather felt than perceived. But the scientific exposition of that unity is the task of exegesis, and, as already intimated in a previous paragraph, it has scarcely more than entered upon its accomplishment. The solar system of revelation moves in a vast and majestic orbit; the forces determining the line of its orbit are numerous and complex. Biblical science has only begun to accumulate the data by which to determine its direction or its governing law.

This reply, I am aware, will not satisfy an objector who occupies anti-supernaturalistic ground. He will claim that it virtually surrenders our position to the rejectors of inspiration. To him we may further reply that the delay in solving the problem is not the fault of theology alone. Communication of supernatural truth, if it take place at all, must, from the nature of the case, be determined by ante-

cedent conditions of language and of mental constitution, existing not only in the individual, but in the race to whom the communication is made. To distinguish between the human and the divine in the production of a historical record such as the Bible, presupposes data derivable only from the sciences of language, mythology, and ethnic psychology. These sciences are comparatively recent and immature. Though they have contributed much to the progress of historical criticism, their chief labor is still to collect facts and verify provisional theories. In establishing definite laws of historical development their success is largely prospective. In this state of the case, with many of the requisite data lacking, it is by no means surprising that theology has thus far philosophized with but imperfect success upon the question of inspiration, and has failed to establish upon a thoroughly scientific basis whatever theory it may have propounded.

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## ARTICLE II.

### THE FIRST CENTURY OF PROTESTANT MISSIONS IN INDIA.

BY JOHN AVERY, PROFESSOR OF GREEK IN BOWDOIN COLLEGE.

THERE is nowhere to be found in heathen lands a more interesting field for missionary effort than India, whether we consider the vastness of its territory and the diversity of its races and languages, or the depth of the superstitions and the antiquity of the institutions which it is sought to replace or develop by the purifying and vitalizing power of the gospel.

The history of the efforts put forth by the Protestant church for the evangelization of India falls conveniently into two periods, distinguished by marked characteristics. The first and longest period, which was nearly conterminous with the eighteenth century, was the time of seed-sowing in a strange soil, under discouraging circumstances; of noble, but sometimes misdirected effort; of success, remarkable at