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## *THE PRESENT DESIDERATA OF THEOLOGY.*<sup>1</sup>

THERE can be nothing more discouraging to a student of theology than the notion that the whole work of theology has been already done, and that nothing now remains but to learn by heart the results arrived at by past thinkers and retail them to the public with more or less adroitness and variety of statement. The data, it is said, of theology are given in the Bible, the contents of the Bible have been sifted through the minds of innumerable expositors, the results have been tabulated in systems of theology; and all that we have to do is to convert texts of Scripture into vessels with which to dip into this lukewarm reservoir, and hand them round for the general consumption.

If this really be the position in which the theological student finds himself in our day, what a contrast it presents to that of the student of science! The latter lives among novelties and surprises; he may alight at any moment on a revolutionary discovery; the horizon is constantly widening around him, and new fields tempt him to come and dig in the virgin soil. This is the kind of life which every true thinker must covet, where there is scope for originality and where research will find its reward.

But the notion that, whilst science is virgin soil, the field of theology is exhausted, though it enjoys extensive popularity, is nothing but a prejudice and a delusion. The truth is, the work of theology, so far from being exhausted, is at present terribly in arrear. The progress of thought

<sup>1</sup> Originally delivered as an address to students of divinity.

in other departments of human interest has brought to the front many questions of great importance which are awaiting replies ; but, in the meantime, within the Church speculation is in a far from vigorous condition. The Church is occupied with different work. After generations of torpor she has awakened to an overwhelming sense of her duty to apply the gospel to the life of the population at home and to carry it to the heathen abroad. The instrumentalities for giving effect to these impulses have been so multiplied, that every congregation is a hive of activities, which it requires the whole time and strength of the minister to direct. Even the professors in our colleges are tempted aside from their proper work to absorb themselves in all kinds of benevolent enterprises.

In some ways this state of things is gratifying, for these are signs of revived spiritual life. But meantime the work of speculation languishes and the unanswered questions accumulate, to the world's perplexity and the Church's danger. William Ames, a godly and orthodox divine of a former age, once well known, but now, I fear, nearly forgotten, says in his great work on *Conscience*, that in his day also the same thing took place : under the reviving breath of the Spirit of God evangelistic activity prevailed, the best spirits giving themselves entirely up to it ; and, whilst this was regarded as the body of the Church's duty, the toil of thought and speculation was valued only as the body's smaller members. But, says he, it turned out that these small members were the fingers and toes of the body ; and without fingers and toes the hands and feet came to be of little use ; and without hands and feet the body threatened to become a helpless log, tossed on the currents of the thought of the time. As in the building of the new Jerusalem, he continues, they handled the sword with one hand, while they built the wall with the other, so must evangelistic activity and sacred speculation go hand in hand,

if the Church is to be in a healthy state and equal to her whole duty.

This is a true testimony. Through exclusive preoccupation with even the highest work, the Church may expose herself to irreparable damage. The world around the Church never stands still. In our day it is in swift and violent motion; and out of the troubled element new knowledge, new ideals, and new problems are rising in bewildering numbers. Unless the Church has at least a part of her mind disengaged to deal with these new births of time—to understand them and absorb them—even the most saintly devotion to practical work will not save her from losing hold of the minds of men.

This is part of the work of the ministry. It is not enough to station on the watch-towers a few men to look out for the signs of the time. Only the diffusion through the teachers of the people as a body of an intelligence able to take a wide survey and a firm grasp of the questions as they arise will enable the Christian faith still to continue what its Founder intended it to be, a leaven leavening the whole lump of human life.

A wise man has said that every minister, besides possessing a competent acquaintance with the whole field of theology, ought to have a specialty of which he is master; he ought to be spoken of as the man who knows so-and-so. Probably this is every aspiring student's ideal. But the efforts put forth in this direction are often comparatively fruitless, through ignorance of the lines of study which are the most hopeful and remunerative at the time. A student would naturally choose for his specialty a field that is fresh and unexhausted. There are certain directions in which earnest and original work is more pressingly needed than in others, and work done there will be more exhilarating to the student than work attempted elsewhere. It is the purpose of this paper to point out where these compara-

tively virgin and undeveloped fields are, which at present invite the work of fresh and willing thinkers.

### I.

Undoubtedly the great new phenomenon of the intellectual world in this age is natural science, and the hypothesis with which science is working is EVOLUTION. Darwin, now that his laborious life is ended, is beginning to be regarded in many quarters as the greatest man of recent times. A hundred young disciples, who worship him, are spreading his doctrines in exaggerated and dogmatic forms. He was always ready to acknowledge the difficulties lying in the way of his ideas; but they are ready to draw out the scheme of the universe, in all its elements, physical and spiritual, as an unbroken evolution from primeval matter.

It is an imposing panorama which is thus unfolded. The universe is an infinite mass of world-forming material in all stages of growth. Here it is utterly rude and shapeless; there form is just beginning to emerge out of chaos; in a third case matter has reached full organization; in a fourth it is tumbling from organization back again to chaos. Our world is only one of millions of experiments of this kind; and in it there has been a gradual ascent from the crudest forms, until man, with the exquisite flower of his intellectual and moral life, has been evolved. How far the evolution may still proceed none can tell; but no doubt our world, like the rest, will sink back into the chaos out of which it has arisen, and again form part of the raw material out of which new experiments of the same kind will in the future be produced. All is under the government of natural law, which is derived from no Lawgiver, but is inherent in the structure of things, and works out its results as a blind perpetual motion.

If any one wishes to see how imposing to the imagination

such a history of the universe may be made, he should read the description of it in a book like Strauss' *Old and New Faith*, where it is depicted with an almost poetical dignity and with the warmth of sincere, if somewhat bitter, conviction. As a creed, it has laid strong hold of the mind of Europe, especially on the Continent, and it begins to spread in the East among the educated classes of India and Japan. In this country the cooler heads acknowledge the breaks which interrupt the demonstration; but as a working hypothesis, it has given such a stimulus to discovery, and, between the breaks, the results are so imposing, that there is a constant tendency to overlook these limitations and give it a universal application. The popular mind feels the charm of an idea which brings the details gathered from a hundred fields under a single point of view; and perhaps no other idea of this kind is so fascinating in itself as that of growth—the long-extended unfolding of the higher out of the lower.

Here, then, is great and pressing work for theological speculation to do; for it would be mere self-deception to flatter ourselves that Christianity is yet done with this immense new phenomenon. The real apologetic of our age will be the Church's deliberate judgment on Darwinism.

This, however, is still to come. Our great apologetic books, such as Butler and Paley, were written before the movement of which evolution is the outcome had set in. They are still used in our colleges and are useful in their way; but they help us little with the problems of the present time. They come from an age which was agitated with different questions; they were written by men who had mastered the thought of their own time, and were able to give the Christian judgment upon it; but there is new work to be done in our time, and new men are needed to do it.

It will be necessary for Christian thought, in the first

place, to master the facts for which Darwinism is a general name. Mere criticism from the outside is of comparatively little use; Darwinism can only be dealt with by one who knows it from within. The Church will have to find out how far it is true, and work this new truth into the body of her own convictions. On this pathway there lie great gains before her; for there is some truth in the apparently eccentric thesis maintained by the author of *Ecce Homo*, in his book on *Natural Religion*, that the Unknown Cause of the agnostic may be a greater and more impressive conception than the Christian's God, because the universe of the scientist's imagination, for which it accounts, is in some cases a larger and grander one than that of the Christian. Our conceptions of God require to be incessantly refreshed by truer and more extended views of the universe of which He is the cause. A book like Professor Drummond's *Natural Law in the Spiritual World* is a specimen of the novel and enriching truths which may be gathered in this inquiry, and it is only the first-fruits of a great harvest.

But, however large be the gifts which Christianity may receive from Darwinism, its chief work in regard to it will be, for a time at all events, the reassertion over against it of the principles of a spiritual philosophy. Mind is not the end, but the beginning, of the evolution of the universe. If there has been an evolution from primeval germs, there must first have been an equivalent involution. If the observation of the senses and the activity of the understanding carry us back to the beginning of evolution, there are powers of the mind still more august which irresistibly carry us farther. If the impressions made on the senses lead us to believe in the existence of material things, the impressions made on a still higher range of faculties give us the like reason for believing in a higher realm of existence. Minds absorbed with material things

may feel these impressions from the higher realm less and less; but they are the glory of human nature, and in its ultimate reckoning with Darwinism the mind of man will insist on giving them their legitimate place.

## II.

The second topic to be named may be said to have been thrown to the surface by chance, in the course of the digging which has taken place about evolution. Although the scientific movement of the age is called evolution—that is, a progress forward and upward from the germs of things to their developed forms—the method of investigation has really been in the opposite direction, from the world as we now see it back through antecedent forms to the beginning. It has really been a revival of history—history being taken in its widest sense, as embracing the past of animals, plants and minerals as well as the past of man. Only the records of the civilised races were formerly dignified with the name of history; but, under the impulse of the new ideas, research has thrown itself with peculiar ardour on the obscure beginnings of civilisation and on the conditions of life anterior to civilisation. Language and folk-lore, customs and institutions, have been traced back to the remotest past, where the light of human life begins to glimmer out of the great darkness.

Now one thing which this searching investigation of the history of man has disclosed is the universal prevalence of religion. Religion is found to have been always the most influential factor in human life. It is now proved, with a force of evidence never before available, that man is a religious animal. Accordingly there has arisen a science concerning itself with this department of human life—the science of religions or *COMPARATIVE RELIGION*. It separates from one another the religions of the world, arranging them in the order of development; it specifies the elements which



are common to them all and contrasts their differences in ritual and creed; it translates their sacred books and estimates their influence.

This is a result of modern research which, it might be thought, would be highly interesting to the spiritual mind; for the universal prevalence and profound influence of religion would appear to be a proof that religion is an inde-feasible element of human nature, which, unless our nature has a lie at its heart, must have an object answering to it outside of itself. It might have been expected that the true religion would have been intensely interested in the false religions, and that Christian theology would have seized on the task of mastering their principles with peculiar avidity. This, however, has not been the case. Theology has allowed this work to be largely done by a science which is anything but theological. The study has its chief seat at present in France; and, pursued as it has been by some of the leading thinkers there, it has grown to be a formidable instrument of unbelief.

For the facts brought to light by the Science of Religions are not in all respects, at first sight at least, favourable to belief. Perhaps, indeed, to a simple faith, few experiences are more trying than a first acquaintance with another religion. Those of our countrymen who go to the East, and are brought face to face with, say, the religions of India, cannot but be struck with the resemblances between them and our own. Both have their places of worship, prayers, sacred books and ministers; and in both human hearts seem to be stirred with the same aspirations and comforted with the same hopes. The suggestion is easy, that there is no fundamental difference between them; and, as we have been taught to look upon these religions as superstitions, the conclusion may be leaped to that Christianity is only one superstition the more.

This train of reflection is one which presses on the mind

with far stronger force when a wide survey is made of religions in general. As the student passes from one system to another, he is overwhelmed with unspeakable melancholy; for he is brought in contact everywhere with the tragedy of convictions for which men have been willing to sacrifice every joy and comfort of existence, and even life itself: yet the tragedy seems to be merely a comedy, for do we not hold it to be all a delusion, till Christianity is reached? But, if the human race has been so terribly mistaken in this region from the first, what likelihood is there that it is right at the last?

This is the argument against Christianity urged in *Robert Elsmere*. Widen your knowledge of the history of the race, says the authoress, acquaint yourself with other religions; and you will find that they have the same arguments with which to support themselves as Christianity: they have their miracles and their fulfilled prophecies, just as it has; but we know that in their case the evidence is of no value; in the case of Christianity it seems sound only when you isolate it from the parallel evidence for other religions: bring the two into comparison, and you will see that they have precisely the same character.

What is the answer to all this? Is it that we have been wrong in characterizing other religions absolutely as false? Although false in some respects, are they true in others? Is it the truth in them, as far as it goes, which has made them acceptable and satisfying to those who have believed them? Are they the partially true, leading up to the absolutely true, which is Christianity? Or is Christianity something which stands wholly apart—the one way of access to God and the only means of salvation—whose glory is made the brighter by the darkness of the universal falsehood with which it is contrasted?

These are pressing questions, but they are by no means simple. If you say, "Yes, these other religions were all

good in their degree; they were honest gropings of the human spirit after the Father, and gave real, though imperfect, culture to the same instincts as are nourished by Christianity," you seem to place yourself in direct antagonism to the vehemently expressed convictions of the prophets and the primitive teachers of the true religion, and with the solemn statements of the Author of this religion Himself. If, on the contrary, you answer the other way, you come into collision not only with the spirit of the age, but apparently also with that sense of sympathy and fairness which has been the light by whose guidance the best conquests of the modern intellect have been made. In short, this is a region which believing theology has still to a large extent to master, and in which there is almost boundless scope for both investigation and speculation.

### III.

A third region in which there is plenty of work clamantly calling for new workers is BIBLICAL CRITICISM. The tendency of the present age to go back to the beginnings of things and sift the records of the past has naturally concentrated itself on those records which Christians believe to be the most important in existence—the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments; and the instruments of criticism, which have been sharpened with use in the testing of other documents, have been applied with especial thoroughness to these.

The critical movement is the commanding phenomenon of our day in theology. The conclusions about the sacred books—their ages, authors and trustworthiness—arrived at by those who drew up the canon, and accepted for many centuries, have all been called in question; and what shape the conviction of the Church about them will assume, when it becomes fixed again, time alone can determine. To do this work lay in the course of the peculiar tendencies of

our time; and it cannot be denied that the accumulation of knowledge and the possession of new methods of research have put the present age in a more advantageous position for investigating this subject than even ages which were far nearer the object of inquiry.

For a hundred years this critical process has been going on in Germany with an immense expenditure of learning and acumen. In Holland and France likewise the movement has had a long history, and, in the former country at least, has not been less thorough in its methods or less disturbing to accepted beliefs than in Germany. The Church has the most vital interest in the process; for the Word of God is the bread of life to her.

But, whilst this warfare of learned opinion has been agitating the Churches of the Continent, we in this country have kept tolerably well out of it. Though the merits of English scholarship have been high in textual criticism, comparatively little has been done here for the higher criticism. The whole process, for example, of investigation in regard to the New Testament from the rise of the Tübingen theories to their partial settlement, which has now perhaps been reached, may, without much exaggeration, be said to have transacted itself without the scholars of this country intervening at all. Our scholars have been content to hover on the outskirts of the battle, waiting to go in, when the combatants had exhausted themselves, and share the spoils.

If the struggle about the New Testament has in some degree quieted down, that about the Old Testament is at this moment in full action. In this case also we may stand by and wait till others have completed the struggle, without taking the trouble to master the learning which is needed to entitle us to have an opinion of our own. But, not to speak of the ignobleness of this position, it is an exceedingly dangerous one; because the whole subject

might be sprung on us at any moment by a single man raising the questions, and we should be put to shame before the public, which looks to us as its religious instructors. This was precisely what happened when Professor Robertson Smith threw down the whole mass of Old Testament problems in the midst of the Free Church of Scotland. The Church was taken unprepared; and at last the controversy had to be closed, not by answering the questions, but by ejecting the questioner. This is not the place of course to express any opinion on the justice or wisdom of the ecclesiastical procedure; but, as a question of learning, the conclusion was eminently unsatisfactory. The subject has been flung outside the door, but at any moment it may burst its way in again; and is any of the Churches ready to deal with it?

Of course the great question in the background is the authority of Scripture; and there are no problems, I imagine, which are perplexing the minds of students of theology more at present than those surrounding the inspiration of the Bible. Has the searching inquiry which has sifted every chapter and verse left it still possible to believe in the Bible as men used to do? Can it be maintained, for instance, that its statements can be reconciled with the ascertained facts of geology, astronomy and history? When two or more accounts of the same events are given, as in the gospels of the New Testament or the historical books of the Old, can the records be proved to agree? Is the miraculous element in the New Testament, and especially in the Old, capable in all details of successful defence? If not—if to any extent mistakes as to matters of fact are to be admitted in the Bible—how can its authority be vindicated in matters of doctrine? Is it reasonable to accept a book as the final standard of truth for faith and conduct, if you say that there are in it myths, exaggerations and mistakes? Is the Bible really

“independent of criticism”? or is there a kind of criticism which is inconsistent with any real reverence for its authority?

Many will be found ready, on both sides, to answer these questions off-hand; but it is far wiser to look upon the answering of them as a task imposed by Providence on this generation, which can only be discharged by honest and patient inquiry, but may and ought to be discharged in faith, because it is His.

On the one hand, it is undeniable that the traditional and popular views about the age and origin of the various books of the Bible stand in urgent need of revisal. When the light of modern research is directed on these books, facts are disclosed in great numbers with which the Church has not yet dealt. She will have to deal with them; for while theories change, facts remain. “There is scarce any truth,” says Thomas Goodwin, “but hath been tried over and over again; and still if any dross happen to mingle with it, then God calls it in question again. The Holy Ghost is so curious, so delicate, so exact, He cannot bear that any falsehood should be mingled with the truths of the gospel. This is the reason why God doth still, age after age, call former things in question, because that there is still some dross one way or other mingled with them.”

On the other hand, it is equally undeniable that the experience of other Churches and countries in dealing with these questions is well fitted to warn, and even to alarm; for it shows, that this work may be so managed as to sow the fields of the Church with the salt of barrenness. We need a thoroughly independent and British study of the whole subject, done by theologians in sympathy with the best religious life of the country. Some of our most advanced thinkers in this department are as yet so dependent on German scholarship for their facts and ideas, that their writings could be broken up into sentences, and the

fragments referred to the different foreign sources to which they belong. Amiel said of certain Swiss *littérateurs*, that they only poured water into the Seine; and there is a great deal of theological work being done at present in this country which is only the pouring of a few buckets into the Rhine. No past age ever had greater reason than ours to prize and revere the Scriptures; they are read more extensively than they have ever been before, and, wherever they are studied, they prove themselves the power of God. This is a conviction which our best experience has formed in us. But the very intensity and serenity with which the Church holds this conviction ought to make her address herself without delay to the frank and thorough appreciation of all the facts.

#### IV.

The work of criticism just described has done one thing for the Bible which may at first sight appear an evil: it has converted it from one book into a number of books. To our fathers it was a single book, from every part of which they quoted indiscriminately, as if it were a homogeneous whole; to us it is a literature, a collection of volumes of different ages and of varied character.

This breaking up of the Scripture is an evil, if it make us lose sight of the unity of the Word of God; for after all, it is truer to say that the Bible is one book than that it is a collection of books: it is one message of redeeming love to men, and among the evidences of its Divine excellence a leading place belongs to "the consent of all the parts and the scope of the whole, which is to give glory to God." But, if it be an evil, it is an evil out of which good has come; for it has given rise, within a century, to a new and most fruitful theological science.

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY only became possible when it was recognised that the literature of which the Bible is com-

posed consists of a number of strata, belonging to different ages and of different character, like the geological formation disclosed by a steep cutting. When the dates of the books are ascertained, and they are arranged in chronological order, it undertakes to show that there is in them a gradual development of revelation, proceeding by slow and sure stages from the earliest to the latest. The older theology was partially aware of such a development from the Old Testament to the New; but this new science undertakes to exhibit it from book to book, or at least, from group to group of books, within each Testament by itself. For example, in the New Testament it distinguishes, say, four great groups of books: first, the synoptic gospels; secondly, the Petrine writings and other books of a similar character; thirdly, the Pauline epistles; and, fourthly, the Johannine writings. In each of these groups there is a complete view of Christianity, proceeding from a central idea and ramifying outwards to the circumference; and Biblical Theology undertakes to reconstruct this view from the documents. As, however, you pass from one of these circles to another, you perceive that you are passing from a simpler to a more advanced view of the subject, till, when the last is reached, the revelation is complete.

There is something intensely fascinating in this mode of study; you might almost call the science which has risen out of it the romance of theology. Perhaps it is the sense of growth which is so attractive; for in all studies this is an inspiring idea. Besides, it brings theology into line with what is the guiding principle of science at the present day. There has been evolution in revelation. God did not give the truth all at once, but "at sundry times and in divers manners." It is thus like all His other works. All God's creations grow. In the field we have first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear; and in human life there is a progress through the stages of child-



hood, youth, manhood and old age. The delight which we feel in watching things grow seems to be borrowed from the Divine mind itself; and the same characteristic which makes the study of nature so fascinating lends, when it is perceived, a new interest to revelation.

There are other advantages which will accrue from this fruitful line of study. It throws light on the difficulties, to which great importance has sometimes been attached, to be met with in the imperfect views of God and morality given in the earlier books of Scripture; for these would appear to be inseparable from this mode of revelation. It is rapidly putting some of the shallower systems of doctrine which have claimed scriptural sanction out of court. It has already, for example, made the claim of Unitarianism to any kind of scriptural support untenable; for it has shown that the deity of Christ is not only proved by isolated texts, as the older divinity was able to show, but lies at the very heart of the whole system of thought of every New Testament writer. Above all, by the thoroughness with which it ascertains the exact contents of every part of Scripture, it is accumulating the materials for a more complete and certain exhibition than the Church has ever hitherto been able to give of what the precise teaching of the Bible is on the various problems with which it deals.

It is not creditable to British theology, that those desiring to begin the study of this noble science, which has existed for a hundred years, should have scarcely any resource but to turn to text-books translated from the German, French or Dutch. The chaos which at present reigns in Old Testament criticism may, indeed, well scare scholars from the task of attempting a Theology of the Old Testament; but the toil, which goes on incessantly, of writing on the books of the New Testament commentaries which are not better than those which already exist might perhaps pause for a time to allow the results of exegesis to be gathered up in

systems of New Testament Theology ; for the latest writer on this science has not formed too enthusiastic an estimate of his own subject when he says: "To me, Biblical Theology is the most important organ which the Church of the present, longing for new spiritual power, and the Dogmatic of the present, thirsting for new principles, possess for bringing living water out of that well from which alone it can be drawn."

V.

One of the advantages suggested above as likely to be derived from the cultivation of biblical theology is, that from the exacter ascertainment of what the Bible actually teaches the materials may be obtained for a new development of dogmatic theology. It can scarcely however be said that dogmatic theology is at present an inviting field to those who, warm with the passion for discovery, may be wishing to dig in virgin soil. Dogmatic theology had its long day of favour, and it will have it again ; but in the meantime the temper of the age rather turns away from it. Perhaps the materials on which it has worked are exhausted, and it must wait till new ones accumulate.

Yet there is one portion of the dogmatic domain which, in this country at least, has been but imperfectly cultivated, and seems at present to promise abundant returns for work which may be expended on it. I mean the field of theological or CHRISTIAN ETHICS.

In our catechisms and systems of divinity it has been usual to find a place for an exposition of the ten commandments as a summary of human duty. In some cases—as, for example, in the *Larger Catechism*—this work has been brilliant of its kind ; but it has scarcely deserved to be called scientific. In fact, the exposition has generally had the appearance of a long and awkward excursus, rather than of a component part of the dogmatic system. The tendency

therefore, which has manifested itself on the Continent of late, to treat Christian Ethics as a separate science, parallel with dogmatics, is a happy one; and some of the most profound and attractive books of the century are on this subject.

In this country we have a very extensive ethical literature; but as a rule it has carefully avoided the Christian or biblical standpoint. Man as an ethical being has been treated simply as a portion of nature, and the new outlooks and possibilities opened to him by revelation have been ignored. This has imported peculiar poverty and coldness into much of our ethical literature. Indeed, to pass from one of our ordinary books on moral philosophy to one of the great works on Christian Ethics produced during the present century on the Continent is like passing from the polar regions to the tropics. In the former, there is usually a careful avoidance of reference to what Christians believe to be the strongest forces working for good and evil in the world—sin, redemption, the Spirit of God, the Church; but in the latter these are the most prominent subjects. Ethical work of great value has recently been done by our native thinkers on questions which belong to the prolegomena of the science; but one does not know where in our literature to look for a system of ethics such as one imagines possible, in which the whole of human life should be pictured forth in grandeur and repose, like a rich and varied landscape seen from a mountain top, with a man's own pathway from time to eternity lying clearly indicated through the midst of it.

The thorough philosophical training which our students receive, and the enthusiasm for philosophy which at present prevails in our universities, ought to make a new development in this direction easy. Many of those who enter the ministry of our Churches have been distinguished in the philosophical classes, and it is surprising that so few of them

afterwards produce anything in the line of their academic attainments. The reason seems to be, that they have not courage enough to forsake the beaten path of ethical discussion and strike into pathways of inquiry more akin to the work of their own office.

These are perhaps the most pressing of the tasks which theology has at present to face; and it will be acknowledged that they present work enough to even the keenest and most aspiring minds. To timid minds, indeed, the description of them may be discouraging. If, it may be asked, so many things are unsettled, is a man justified in going forward to preach the gospel, before the difficulties have been cleared away? When reading the history of our own country in times of conflict, such, for example, as the period of the Napoleonic wars, a reader may become so absorbed in campaigns and sieges, fields of battle and fights at sea, as to have the impression that during those years all England must have been standing on tiptoe, watching with straining eyes and beating heart to see what was to be the issue of the conflict which imperilled her existence. But it will surprise him, upon making a closer acquaintance with the history of the period, to discover that during these years, on the island "ribbed and paled in with rocks unscalable and roaring waters," life was going on much as usual: the fields were tilled and the harvests reaped; spring with its freshness and summer with its glory gladdened the land; the mill-wheel went round, the hammer rang on the anvil, and the shuttle flew through the web; men slept and woke and ate their daily bread; children were born, lovers married, and widows wept; nor were laughter and merriment much less loud than usual; the various life of a great and happy people went on from day to day. In the same way, the warfare with unbelief is at present loud and far-extended, and sometimes the problems of the day will seem

to us, as we study them, to be so momentous, that we think everything ought to stop till they are settled. But Christianity is not a country which still needs to be discovered. It is a home of human souls, wide, well known and intensely loved, from whose soil a hundred generations have been nourished; and, though there is at present pressing work in theology for the soldier-thinker to do, who marches to the borders to defend the faith against the inroads of scepticism, and for the pioneer-thinker, who goes in search of lands in which belief may find new dwellings, yet to cultivate the fields of the old home as faithful husbandmen, that its children may not lack their food, but grow up in spiritual health and strength, will ever be the main work of the Christian ministry.

JAMES STALKER.

### THE FUNCTION OF TRIAL.

"James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes of the Dispersion, Joy to you. Count it all joy, my brethren, when ye fall into manifold trials, knowing that the proving of your faith worketh patience; but let patience have a perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, lacking in nothing."—JAS. i. 1-4.

JAMES was "the Lord's brother," or, as we should say, His first cousin, His close kinsman—the Greek word for "brother" having a larger meaning than ours. Was not this the most honourable of his titles, and the surest passport to his readers' esteem? Apparently he thinks not; for he designates himself "*a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ*," as if this were the highest title he could claim; as indeed it was. For the Lord Jesus Himself affirmed that "to do the will of His Father" was better than to be His brother after the flesh; and when "a certain woman of the company lifted up her voice," and exclaimed