

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

**PayPal**

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *The Expository Times* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_expository-times\\_01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expository-times_01.php)

pdfs are named: [Volume]\_[Issue]\_[1<sup>st</sup> page of article].pdf

why should it be endangered if it be proved that the Pentateuch is in a like case, if Deuteronomy should turn out to be a late edition of ancient laws, and that many enactments of recent origin have been attached to the primitive works of Moses? In like manner the Archbishop shows how neither the supposed authority of our Lord and His apostles nor of the Church have closed those questions of authorship and date upon which historical criticism alone has a right to speak. But, granting to the fullest degree the late date of much that used to be supposed to be very early in the O.T. literature, the history of Israel could be in all essentials reconstructed from the prophets, from

Amos, Hosea, and Micah, whose authenticity is as indisputable as that of the Epistles to the Romans, the Galatians, and the Corinthians. Archbishop Mignot practically adopts, in fact, the apologetic argument of the late Professor Bruce, of which he speaks in laudatory terms. From the prophets we can learn what was the religious past of Israel, and in their writings we can see the rôle they played in the preparation for the Messianic kingdom. The value of all this is unaffected by critical conclusions as to the historical books. In the history of prophetism our author finds the true Scripture basis of apologetics.

J. A. SELBIE.

*Maryculter.*

## Science and Faith.

BY THE REV. G. FERRIES, M.A., D.D., CLUNY, ABERDEENSHIRE.

### III.

#### Advantages derived from the Interaction of Religion and Science.

IT is but half the truth to say that recent science makes the acquisition of faith difficult, and that many are chiefly impressed by the difficulties and are overborne by doubt. In the case of those who have gained a spiritual faith, and who are also in sympathy with the proper aims of science, as those may be expected to be who have grown with its growth, the latter exerts a rejuvenating, stimulating, and widening influence on their religion itself. A happy change in this respect is now in progress. Even so lately as a generation ago, the most noticeable effect on religion of the advance of science was to draw forth from pious and reflective people a cry of distress. They made many anxious endeavours to reconcile the cosmogony of the opening chapters of Genesis with astronomy and geology, and were alarmed at the doctrine of Evolution, as if it implied Atheism and the overthrow of Scripture, and found themselves threatened with a philosophy which saw in Matter 'the promise and potency of all terrestrial life.' In this connexion it was the mere struggle for existence on the part of religion that mainly bulked in men's minds. But truth in religion as elsewhere is set in a clearer light, and is therefore promoted, by inquiry and

conflict; and, accordingly, it is fitting that reference should be made to some of the gains for faith which may now be registered as the fruit of many years of earnest effort; although multitudes still find themselves unable, for such reasons as those already mentioned, to share in those fruits, and although an Agnostic philosophy (often but an ill-defined habit of thought) has come to succeed the other sceptical systems whose influence has waned.

The interest with which Schleiermacher invested the inquiry into the subject of religion as an existing fact continues till now. The study of man's nature and powers shows religion to be an essential feature of his life, placed as he is in this world. Religion, it is made apparent, is not merely imposed upon him by authority, whether of priests or sacred books, nor does it consist of questionable speculations; it is an element of his nature without which he could not attain the full dignity of his rank among the creatures; and men and books can only serve as the means for bringing this religious faculty to full exercise and fruition. One returns with fresh zest to the cultivation of what he knows to be a phase, and the richest phase, of his own life, and feels the stimulus

which is imparted to him who works with a high, intelligent appreciation of his position and privileges, and not merely because he is impelled by authority or custom.

Historical science, having first been tested in other fields, could not fail to introduce its spirit and methods into the study of the religious life of old Israel and the first Christians, and to elucidate as far as possible the record of that life which we possess in Scripture. In this country, Robertson Smith, following in the steps of Graf and Wellhausen, pointed out (*O.T. in the Jewish Church*, lect. vi.) how the Canon of the O.T. was established, not by some inexplicable divine decree, but by the discernment of the pious community of the Jews, who, with devout care, assigned pre-eminence and exclusive authority to the writings which, as a matter of fact, responded to the faith of their hearts. The principle of selection there brought to view is of far-reaching significance. Scripture holds its high rank in our esteem as being the record of the religious life at its best. We are invited to examine the grounds of its claims, and to enter into the life to which it testifies, and we cannot fail to derive much benefit by so doing. The aim is now to reproduce, as far as may be, by the resources of archæology, general history, and literary criticism the exact situations in which the great men of Scripture were placed, and so to render their thought fluid, to discover their spiritual motives, and to reach their heart. Their life thus becomes a light to men in every age; for the hearts of mankind, their chief needs, are always the same. In particular, the prophets are no longer regarded as mere predictors, whose function was to supply material for the use of latter-day apologists; they were the religious guides of the people of their own land and time, 'spokesmen for God,' preachers of spiritual religion, moral and social reformers, whose principles can be apprehended by us in their original purity and force, and ought to be applied by all who seek the ends of Christian faith and eternal righteousness. The same line of remark applies to the N.T. writings. They were collected and set apart by the living faith of the Church; and they have the authority which is derived from the fact that the Church's faith was itself formed through the indwelling Spirit of God, which was supplied in the early times in special measure. And as regards the great men of the new dispensation, St. Paul,

e.g. when viewed in his historical surroundings, is not simply a hard dogmatist, as he has often been supposed to be: he gains full sympathy and admiration; his spiritual aims stand out as the loftiest and purest; his life exhibits devoted self-sacrifice, and his intellect shows itself to be masterly. In him Christianity commends itself to our soul and conscience by its magnificent fruit.—Above all, historical inquiry has impelled men to set less store by tradition, which often obscured the will of God, and to 'return to Christ,' so as to find in Him the source and centre of Christian faith and life. This course cannot fail, when the necessary precautions are taken, to convey incalculable blessing to the Churches. For the gospel message, as brought by Jesus Himself, has a peculiarly convincing efficacy, being at once simple, translucent, profoundly ethical, and satisfying to the heart by its Revelation of God as Father. It is true that there is not material to form a 'Life of Christ,' though there have been many so-called Lives; but the mind, the teaching, the Personality of Jesus can be largely understood, and in so far as they are apprehended, the will of God with every man is discovered. Christ is not merely the Redeemer of the world by His death; in a way which it is impossible to realize: He can be known as the effectual Revealer of God by the perfect goodness of His Personality, and the death of the Crucified One may be recognized as the crown and completion of the goodness manifested in His life. Christianity, as seen in its source, is not an infertile body of dogma, but a living power of the Spirit, uniting God and man by the bond of a spiritual faith and an ideal morality. The spirit and the morality are perennial, and can be infused with transforming effect into the life of the present. They are applicable to all circumstances; and as the men of to-day allow themselves to be baptized with that original spirit, and enter into its aims in their worldly practice, they find that fresh intuitions of Christian truth are caught by them in countless number; endless vistas are opened up in all directions; it is felt that the whole of modern life can and ought to be spiritualized. And, again, when Christians are led by careful scrutiny to look beyond the letter of Scripture, and to acknowledge the spiritual Christ and His perfect morality as the enduring essence of the N.T., they have attained a principle of union by which they can

be drawn into one spiritual brotherhood and be conscious of their fellowship.

Furthermore, history throws light on the origin and essence of dogma, disclosing the circumstances which led to its formation, and so affording guidance for the intelligent and profitable use of it, assigning a relative significance to it, and making it cease to appear as an intolerable yoke.

But natural law, universal causation, which science brings to light, appears to many to have a chilling effect for faith, and to undo the comforting conviction that their life is secured in all its interests by a watchful Providence. Now, without order in nature, so steadfast that it can be counted on, they could not get the best and most necessary gift of all, namely, righteousness. They have the means of improving in moral character, only if they know the natural consequences of their action, from past observation and from memory, and if they choose their course of action with the conviction that the laws of nature will hold good in the present and future. In proportion, therefore, as those laws are ascertained, the more opportunities for moral advancement will there be, the more benefits of the highest value will be available, the more occasions will be found for pleasing a righteous God. Causation in the material sphere should be welcomed in the interest of ethical religion. The soul has its own means of rising to felt union with God, and in hours of devotion it is clearly realized that He is the God 'who holds all nature up,' and that no operation whatever is withdrawn from His control. This persuasion can be retained in those other hours when one pursues the even course of obeying natural law and using it for righteous ends: the spiritual is now and always set over the material. And in that case nothing but advantage can accrue to faith from any possible advance of natural science in future. In any event, the spiritual God and the perfect righteousness known through Christ will remain immovable; and the more the wonders in nature and history are unfolded, the more will our estimation be enhanced of that spiritual domain which is yet more marvellous than the earth, and the more cause will be found for ascribing glory to God who rules the universe both of matter and spirit.

But though there have been advantages to faith from the growth of the scientific spirit, the new process of thought in theology is still very imperfect; it has only accomplished a stage in its

onward march, and has not reached the goal. Men have to brace themselves to the intellectual tasks which are now incumbent on them. In particular, while science meets with universal acceptance, it has to be admitted that no statement of the Christian faith exists which commends itself as a necessary and sufficient presentation of the truth, in the judgment even of that body of Christians who are in sympathy with modern science. To frame such a statement is a work of the first importance that is now pressing. It ought not, however, to be surprising that the task has not yet been accomplished, and no blame is necessarily implied by the non-fulfilment of it. For the historical sciences are but a recent product; it was previously stated that not long ago the idea of Evolution came upon people as a surprise. It is in our day that that idea has been applied to all departments of knowledge, and people are only yet trying to realize the changed aspect of things. An adjustment of religious thought to a view of the world which is only now beginning to assume definite form was hitherto, as a matter of course, not practicable or conceivable. But already men are animated with hope in this regard, and in view of the spiritual gains actually achieved, that hope is well grounded; indeed, those who are convinced that Christianity is the truth must be certain that with patience and persistent effort it will be realized. As a matter of fact, there have been praiseworthy endeavours of late to carry out the task referred to. But at most there can only be a relative and temporary settlement. For secular thought will move on; new truth will be gathered in future both in the sacred and in the secular sphere; and, as in a chemical combination, any theology that may arise will be transformed in turn when new truth is added to it, for it will be seen in a new light. Hence the applicability of the maxim, *Ecclesia semper reformari debet*.

The great bulk of recent theological works, having for their aim to commend religious truth to the present generation, have striven to reconcile the spiritual sphere with science. Such books are countless, some of the best work being done in special and very limited fields, or in commentaries on single Books of Scripture. Martineau's *Study of Religion* is a valuable eirenicon between spiritual faith and current science. Jevons' *Principles of Science* and Eucken's *Die Grundbegriffe der Gegen-*

ward insist on the rights of the spiritual nature of man in face of certain widespread pretensions which are fathered on science. The appeal which faith makes to the intelligence, the essentially rational character of Religion, is brought out in Biedermann's *Dogmatik*, Caird's *Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* and *The Fundamental Ideas of Christianity*, and in Fairbairn's *The Place of Christ in Modern Theology*. These show an affinity with Hegel's philosophy, and supply the means of combating Agnosticism. Other sceptical systems are refuted in Flint's *Anti-Theistic Theories*. From the school that succeeded Hegel and aimed at placing theology in touch with positive science there are, e.g., Ritschl's *Justification and Reconciliation*, Herrmann's *Communion of the Christian with God*, Kaftan's *Truth of the Christian Religion and Dogmatik*, and in Church History the voluminous writings of Harnack, especially *History of Dogma*; also articles in the *Christliche Welt* and in the *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*. Hatch's

*Influence of Greek Ideas and Usages on the Christian Church* is written in this sense. Ecke's *Die Theologische Schule Albrecht Ritschl's* is a sympathetic and discriminating critique; so too is Garvie's *The Ritschlian Theology*. Useful matter on the nature of religious knowledge is given in the first part of Lipsius' *Dogmatik* and in Biedermann's *Dogmatik*, vol. i., and in the Philosophies of Religion, e.g. Sabatier's *Sketch*, a lucid and attractive exposition, or Tiele's *Edinburgh Gifford Lectures*. Dillmann's *Commentary on Genesis* and Schultz *O.T. Theology* treat of the records in the earlier part of Genesis from the point of view of science and history.—The Lectures on the Gifford foundation at the Scottish universities are designed to investigate the evidences for religious belief, so far as these may be open to scientific or rational inquiry, and do not rest on mere authority.—The more important works on Theology and its relation to science and philosophy are discussed in Pfeiderer's *Development of Theology in Germany and Britain*.

## The Great Text Commentary.

### THE GREAT TEXTS OF HEBREWS.

#### HEBREWS XII. 1.

'Therefore let us also, seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us' (R.V.).

#### EXPOSITION.

'So great a cloud of witnesses.'—The writer regards himself and his fellow-Christians as placed in an arena and contending for a great prize. The image of the amphitheatre with the rising rows of spectators seems to suggest the thought of an encircling cloud. The witnesses of whom the cloud is composed are unquestionably the countless heroes of faith whose deeds have been summarized in chap. II. The testimony which they bear can only be the testimony which they bear to God, either by victorious achievements or by courageous sufferings, answering to that which He has wrought for and in them. In both respects, as conquerors and as sufferers, they witness to His power and faithfulness; and those who regard them cannot but be strengthened by their testimony.

THERE is apparently no evidence that *μαρτυρῶν* is ever used simply in the sense of a spectator. . . . At the same time it is impossible to exclude the thought of the spectators in

the amphitheatre. The passage would not lose in vividness though it would lose in power if *θεατῶν* were substituted for *μαρτυρῶν*. These champions of old time occupy the place of spectators, but they are more than spectators. They are spectators who interpret to us the meaning of our struggle, and who bear testimony to the certainty of our success if we strive lawfully.—WESTCOTT.

'Every weight.'—The word 'weight' was used technically, in the language of athletes, to mean 'superfluous flesh' to be reduced by training. The training requisite to make the body supple and sinewy was severe and long-continued. Metaphorically the word comes to mean 'pride,' 'inflation.'—FARRAR.

THE things called 'weights' are distinguished from 'sin,' and are possibly things that are laid aside by one who desires to run well, though in others and in their own nature they may not be objectionable, or faulty, but even comely. An appetite, though lawful, that tends to gain on one; devotion to some pursuit in danger of absorbing the mind; an affection that threatens to turn away the heart,—such things are weights.—DAVIDSON.

'The sin which doth so easily beset us.'—The reference is not to one particular sin as specially dangerous, but to *sin itself*. The article is generic. *All sin*.—VAUGHAN.

THE six words 'which doth so easily beset us' represent one Greek word, *euperistaton*, of which the meaning is un-