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IX.

THE WESTMINSTER SYMBOLS CONSIDERED IN
RELATION TO CURRENT POPULAR THEOL-
OGY AND THE NEEDS OF THE FUTURE.

BY

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ANALYSIS.

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IX.

THE WESTMINSTER SYMBOLS CONSIDERED IN RELATION TO CURRENT POPULAR THEOL- OGY AND THE NEEDS OF THE FUTURE.

THE topic assigned me deals with a comparison, the terms of which are the Westminster symbols on the one hand, and the current popular theology on the other. The first term of this comparison has been presented already with great clearness and with signal ability by the distinguished speakers who have preceded me, so that it may be safely assumed that at this stage of our programme the audience has a clear and comprehensive conception of the contents and the character of these great symbols; when the distinctive features and salient points of the current popular theology of the day shall have been set forth, the comparison will have been instituted, the relation between the two will be self-evident, and the part the Westminster Standards must play in the needs of the future will appear implicit in the comparison, needing, if anything, emphasis only.

Let it be said in the outset that there are certain characteristics common to this theology that need to be noted; some of them to be constantly remembered, inasmuch as they greatly embarrass any attempt to give an exact and concise statement of the views therein advanced.

Bear in mind, then, that it represents a tendency rather than any clearly-defined system of doctrine or dis-

tinctly-formulated creed; it is more like a school of thought in what seems to be a transition period. All its deliverances are more or less vague, its terms indefinite and uncertain. It is negative rather than positive, consisting chiefly in the criticism of existing systems, far more successful in the discovery of weakness than in the development of strength, more alert and acute in the emphasis of alleged existing difficulties and objections than capable and effective in the removal of them, telescopic and microscopic alike in the vision of defects, but myopic to a degree in the vision of any remedies that really remedy.

Its representatives set forth with great vigor and great plainness the faults of the conservative theology, and they assume with equal positiveness an immense superiority in behalf of the new, but just wherein exactly this assumed superiority consists they fail with any definiteness to show.

The natural effect of this vagueness is, moreover, heightened by a free and frequent use of terms long familiar and inseparably associated with certain fixed, definite ideas; but they invest these terms with a new and a different meaning, using them in a way—

“That palter with us in a double sense,
That keeps the word of promise to our ear
And breaks it to our hope.”

The casual reader is very likely to be misled by such use of the familiar terms; and failing to discriminate is often surprised and sometimes somewhat indignant at what he conceives to be unjust and uncharitable criticism. It has no lines of theological or ecclesiastical demarcation; it runs through all churches and has its representatives in all schools of theology. It is a sort of theological cave of Adullam into which every man

that hath any quarrel with his creed doth resort with great gladness and not seldom with some noise.

It owns, however, no David; recognizes no master; has no accredited representatives authorized to speak for it; puts forth no confession of its faith to which appeal may be made. Exactly what the Westminster symbols teach is within the compass of any intelligence willing to study these Standards, but when one turns to the popular theology of the day, what shall be his guide? Its advocates well illustrate what one of their number aptly styles the Freedom of Faith. The only way to arrive at the views held by this school is to collect and collate the deliverances of its most prominent and active exponents, remembering always that no one is entitled to speak for any other; any one of them may, with all honesty of heart, repudiate the deliverances of all others and earnestly contend that such views do not represent the new theology, while with equal right any and all others may refuse recognition to *his* views. Each representative writes as if he carried the whole Progressive Theology immediately under the crown of his own hat. This fact I wish to emphasize in order to guard against individual injustice, and because, moreover, it affords opportunity distinctly to recognize that among the adherents of this current popular theology are found not only men of diverse views, but also of very different dispositions and characters, among them some of sweet spirit and devout consecration and effective service for God and man. Let it be remembered that we deal not with the characters of such, but only with doctrinal views. Could such men control the discussion I should have less to say in criticism; could such characters counteract the effect of such views we should have less to fear; but alas! they cannot; however sweet-spirited

men may be, logic is relentless; a conclusion is not greatly affected by the character of him who furnishes its premises, and these shining exceptions are sometimes contributing to results from which they would shrink in horror, while their amiable and excellent character serves only to aggravate the evil. It must be said also, that men of this stamp are not sufficiently numerous or active to exercise any considerable influence on the discussion; for *it* assuredly is, in the main, anything but sweet-spirited and amiable, and is marked by a conspicuous absence of certain characteristics of the wisdom that is from above; even if it be granted that conservative theology has been overtaken in its faults, it can scarcely be claimed that this effort to restore it has been especially marked by a spirit of meekness.

One of the most constant characteristics of the discussion is the absence of Scripture citation. This is the more remarkable and peculiar when we remember that the new theology claims for itself a preëminently biblical character as one of its distinctive differentiæ, distinguishing it from that of such symbols as the Westminster, which is asserted to be scholastic rather than biblical, while the new claims to be exactly the reverse; but one misses greatly that constant resort to the *ipsissima verba* of sacred Scripture which conservative theology has made so familiar; we have, instead, some argument, many assertions, a multitude of assumptions, but rarely ever a Scripture text; our progressive brethren profess great reverence for the spirit of Scripture, but they make scant appeal to its letter; they seem to write under the conviction that "the letter killeth," and not without cause; for if there is a single readjustment of theirs that can survive an appeal to the letter of God's word, I have failed utterly to find it.

Besides claiming to be more biblical, it claims also

to be more ethical, more evangelical, more spiritual; asserts "an increasing frankness," "a deepening sincerity," "a deepening spirituality"; but this deepening sincerity does not seem to abridge the liberty its representatives exercise in the interpretation of their ostensible creeds, nor does their superior spirituality prevent their drawing the stipend of a church whose windows they break from the inside; in view of which facts they lay themselves liable to the suspicion of having misplaced their somewhat vaunted "elasticity," inasmuch as it seems to lie not so much in the creed as in the conscience.

Having noticed that this current theology has no lines of demarcation, we remark finally in this connection that it has apparently no bond of union save that of discontent; the spirit of the Melancholy Dane, without his melancholy, however:

"The times are out of joint; Oh! cursed spite
That ever I was born to set them right."

In this spirit they are in heartiest accord, except that they do not seem to consider it a cursed spite that devolves the duty; it is on the contrary a self-elected task and one pursued thoroughly *con amore*. Amid all differences there is one thing in which they are all and altogether, absolutely, cordially unanimous, viz.: that conservative theology is in desperate need of a renascence, and that it is their mission to meet this need; they agree very heartily in an inveterate and virulent dislike of all systematic theology in general and of Calvinism in particular.

Searching for some advantageous starting-point for a brief but comprehensive survey of the whole field, I conceive the doctrine of the divine immanence to furnish our best approach; this rather than any other impresses

me as the regulative principle of the whole, so far as it has any regulative principle; here, if anywhere, we shall find a unifying element. It is a doctrine derived, doubtless, from Schleiermacher, who, more than any other, may be considered the father of this new school,¹ This very able and very distinguished man is a theological paradox, one of the most wonderful eclectics the world has ever seen, blending in his fervent soul and brilliant brain more contradictories of feeling and of thought than any other one man, possibly, of this prolific century. His earliest, deepest, most abiding impressions were derived from the Moravians; his association with them gave a devoutness to his feeling and his thought which was never afterwards lost. Then followed the fascinating influence of Spinoza's brilliant genius which graved an indelible impress into the very heart of his philosophy. Spinoza dominates Schleiermacher's thinking.

We then have superimposed upon these two fundamental, coördinate impresses the then young, though regnant, philosophy of that day: Plato, Descartes, Kant, Lessing, Fichte, Hegel and Schelling. These all enter influentially into Schleiermacher's philosophic makeup, and all leave distinct traces of their influence on him. So that we have in this wonderful man the well-nigh incredible blending of three utterly diverse elements, each of the three decidedly marked and wonderfully dis-

¹Of course, I would not be misunderstood as ignoring the influence of other leaders more modern and far more prominent in the public eye. I desire to go to the *fountain* whence all these later, lesser streams flow. If one wishes to understand the true character of this so-called *new* theology, let him study this light which dawned in 1768.

“ *micat inter omnes*
 *velut inter ignes*
Luna minores.”

tinct, viz.: *Mysticism, Pantheism, and Rationalism*. If called upon to combine them into one compound, we should be compelled to call him a mystic, pantheistic rationalist! For though he began by putting imperious conclusion to the long conflict between reason and faith by the simple process of ordering the former off the field, cutting the Gordian knot of rationalistic difficulties by peremptorily ruling reason as an authority out of the realm of religion utterly, yet by a *bouleversement* most remarkable he ended by presenting the world, in the name of theology, a philosophy simple pure and one virtually and radically rationalistic at that!

We have not space here for any attempt at a survey or analysis of this system of religious philosophy; suffice it to say with utmost brevity, that tried by the Standards prevailing in this presence, he is, in our judgment at least, not sound on a single doctrine. The relevance of this statement appears when we state our conviction that every distinctive feature of the current popular theology reveals Schleiermacher's influence; reveals it very distinctly, sometimes very directly. He occupies practically, though not formally, substantially the same position in the new theology that Calvin does in the reformed. One of the most eminent and learned advocates of the former says unequivocally: "Schleiermacher still utters the truth to which all that is highest in modern Christianity responds."

Schleiermacher's doctrine of the divine immanence is simply Spinoza's pantheism spiritualized, and in the new theology the same doctrine appears clearly reflected, the color remains distinct, simply paled into a lighter shade. The descent of the doctrine is very direct; Schleiermacher is its father and Spinoza its grandfather; one who knows its paternal ancestry would, in any theo-

logical court, unhesitatingly swear to the legitimacy of the offspring; it carries its credentials in its very countenance.

Just what this doctrine means in the mouths of its advocates, we find it impossible to state with any confidence. The terms and references are of the vaguest and most indefinite kind. They allege in very general terms that the conservative school teaches a God remote, removed from the world, shut out from his creation, whereas the new reveals a God near at hand, the former a God isolated, the latter a God in close connection; they emphasize as the difference and the defect of the orthodox theology that it teaches a transcendent God, the progressive, an immanent God; when we endeavor, however, to discover more definitely the exact difference between the two, according to the claims of the progressives, we find ourselves utterly at fault for lack of anything even distantly approaching clear definition. Exact definition is something the new theology seems to abhor as much as the devil is popularly supposed to abhor holy water, and which it avoids as uniformly as it does Scripture citation. In all the terms that make any show of distinguishing between what its writers mean by this immanence and what they are pleased to call the transcendence of the old theology, their immanence takes on the complexion of pantheism and reveals the traces of Spinoza's influence on the great father of their school. All of their boasted advance on the conservative doctrine is in the direction of pantheism. I may be permitted to interject here that in my judgment this is inevitable; for I believe that the conservative doctrine so far from teaching a God remote, teaches, on the contrary, a connection so close and intimate that none can be closer; the only alternative is pantheism or the practical merg-

ing of the identity of God in that of the universe. While it may not be strictly just to call their doctrine or the divine immanence pantheism, we feel perfectly safe in saying that it is pantheistic. Let us proceed, however, to our consideration of this doctrine as the regulative principle of the new theology.

According to it, God is in some mysterious way undefined and, perhaps indefinable, so actually, intimately, closely interposed with some sort of a constant, habitual, ordinary connection with the world both of nature and of grace, that there is no need and there can be no place for any extraordinary interposition—or “interruption” as they prefer to style it—and hence the miracle becomes a superfluity and an impertinence. Some would do away with the miraculous entirely, as Schleiermacher does in the Gospels, sweeping away every miracle in the narrative, admitting into his whole scheme two only: the miracle of the creation, and the miracle of the Christ. Few go so far as this, but there is among them all a marked disposition to minimize the miraculous; a disposition often not least influential when unavowed, appearing frequently in incidental comment upon the miracles themselves or in innocent and insinuating paraphrase of the narrative containing them.

God being so intimately immanent, and that, too, by virtue of so constant, so habitual, so ordinary a connection, the distinction between the natural and the supernatural is greatly obscured, in many instances virtually, if not formally, obliterated. Schleiermacher himself recognized no difference whatever between natural and revealed religion, the natural is supernatural, and the supernatural natural; not many are so extreme as the great leader, but there is in the whole school a constant tendency to eliminate the supernatural, and this in every

department and in every direction. According to the explanations and interpretations of this school a modern Nicodemus would have small occasion ever to ask, How can these things be? and the natural man will be amply capable of receiving and knowing all these things, for they are very naturally discerned. This tendency to eliminate the supernatural is at once indicated, promoted, and measured by one of the popular fads of the day, the craze for analogies that has prevailed now for some years—a movement that finds its full flower in the brilliant fancies and corruscating word-play of such writers as the late Henry Drummond.

From the same seminal source develops also the conception of a progressive revelation—though I must record here my protest against such palpable perversion of the word revelation—that the revelation of God to man is “a continuous process through the reason, through experience, through the courses of history, or through the events and discipline of life,” a gradual unfolding of knowledge under favoring auspices, a perfectly simple and a perfectly natural process, reducing what we have been wont to call divine inspiration to mere illumination, the product of spirituality, differing in degree not in kind, the only difference between those who still continue to be called the inspired writers and the devout of later ages lying in surroundings and circumstances, or what this pretentious period loves to call “environment.” Which age has the advantage is a matter for each student to determine for himself; some saying that the advantage lies preëminently with the disciples and apostles of our Lord, while other some modestly affirm with Henry Ward Beecher that they believe what Paul, *e. g.*, would have believed had he lived in this day! The logic of the position is most evidently on the side of the

latter class; revelation being like everything else a process, going on under the influence of an immanent God, it presumably improves with every age under the great law of progressive development; with any such view of revelation it is simply absurd and childish to shrink from the implication that Beecher knew more of Christ than Paul.

From this it is only a step, and a very short step, that ushers us into the whole field of the most radical criticism and that both explains and justifies all its methods and all its results. We need feel no surprise, we should experience no shock at the freedom with which the sacred record is treated, is amended, is corrected, is improved generally. Its sacredness has been "developed" out of it; what claim has it for any special reverence? Of course, critics who enjoy the advantage of a continuous revelation cannot be reasonably expected to hesitate at amending the utterances of men who are nearly twenty centuries behind the present stage of revelation; and hence we say that the most radical criticism is only the logical and inevitable outcome of the dominant principle of the whole school.

Closely allied with this is the view entertained of Christ's mission into the world; it is the paramount expression of this immanence or the culminating stage of the progressive revelation of the immanent God. (The only difficulty being in the fact that the revelation seems still to progress after its culmination!) "The life of Christ was not the humiliation of the Son of God, the divine glory concealed, as it were, behind a veil." On the contrary, "He was the revelation of God in his absolute glory," and we are told that "when Schleiermacher discovered this as by a revelation, the unveiled glory of God, the thought of ages, was reversed." Ac-

According to this view of his mission, Christ is the inevitable and the natural flower of God's revealing purpose; the necessary outcome of the divine immanence, its complement and its consummation.

Such being the character and the purpose of Christ's mission, the incarnation leading and intended to lead to a more perfect and a more permanent immanence, we have resulting some very peculiar views of the incarnation of Christ, not as the "taking to himself a true body and a reasonable soul," but as a union with the human race, a sort of infusion or injection of the divine into the race, a species of genetic, organic, permanent connection of God with mankind, with the race as a race, just as close in its connection as was that of Adam. Here again, and for the same reason as heretofore, we cannot define; but the new theology refers very emphatically and quite frequently to some such mysterious, generic union whereby the divine immanence is by Christ's incarnation rendered still more intimately and effectively immanent, with certain very decided doctrinal developments.

(1), There emerges somewhere and somehow a somewhat, which they call "The Solidarity of the Race," which broadens the scope of Christ's work to the utter annihilation of all such narrowness as election, limited atonement, and the like.

"If it is a fallen world, it is also a redeemed world; if it is a lost world, it is also a saved world; the Christ is no less to it than Adam; the divine humanity is no smaller than the Adamic humanity; the Spirit is as powerful and as universal as sin; the links that bind the race to evil are correlated by links equally strong binding it to righteousness."

There is a certain sense in which that language might be used by conservative theology, though it would de-

serve to be considered loose writing in any sense; that the *looseness*, however, is not simply in the style is made evident by the paragraph which immediately follows it:

"It (*i. e.*, the new theology) goes in a certain manner with the old theology in its views of common evil, but it diverges from it in its conceptions of the redemptive and delivering forces by ascribing to them corresponding sweep. To repeat: it does not admit that Christ is less to the race than Adam, that the gospel is smaller than evil. . . . It allies itself with the thought of the present age and the best thought of all ages; that mankind is moved by common forces, and follows "common tendencies, falling and rising together in all good and ill desert, verifying the phrase, 'the life of humanity.'"

The uniform use of the word "race," or its equivalent, is the key to the foregoing paragraphs; the incarnation brings about an organic connection between Christ and the race; the union is a racial, not a personal union. This is the far-reaching significance of the phrase, "solidarity of the race."

(2), A second doctrinal result of this phase of the divine immanence is that by this generic union of the divine with the human there is exerted such a moral and spiritual influence upon the race as to render the conservative view of the corruption and depravity of our nature an anachronism and an absurdity; it, therefore, revolutionizes the whole of anthropology and soteriology, and of necessity very materially modifies the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and of his work.

(3), A third distinct result of this view of the divine immanence, in its influence on the effects of the incarnation, is seen in the begetting and development of the modern doctrine of the Christian consciousness, as it is called, with all its fruitage. This doctrine is reserved for special consideration at a later stage of my address.

This divine immanence, entering into the human race as a race, being as wide in its scope and as universal in its energy as the limits of mankind, the logical consequence is that God reveals himself to and allies himself with all peoples, in all ages, and in every quarter of the world, the only difference being in somewhat differing degrees of clearness; Christianity has no more inherent affinity, no closer connection, with Judaism than with any and all other ancient systems. It is merely the resultant of a development going on under the steady influence of the divine immanence. Christianity, they are fond of saying, comes not to destroy, but to fulfil, and this with reference to all the vast variety of heathen mythologies, not a whit less than with reference to Judaism. All the so-called science of comparative religions is a logical outcome, and you will find it figuring naturally and prominently in the new theology, with not a hint that Judaism is any more divine in its origin than Buddhism.

Under the dominant influence of this conception of the divine immanence, you discover on all hands and in increasing measure the disposition to bring every department of Christian doctrine, and every phase of religious experience, all of providence and all of grace, under the dominion of one great natural law, that of progressive development; revelation is a process, the incarnation is a process, the atonement is a process, regeneration is a process, justification is a process, probation is a process, judgment is a process. The entire field of eschatology needs revision and restatement; death is not decisive of destiny, there is no limit in time or eternity to probation, to discipline, to development. This latter you will remember as one of the first departures of the new theology to arrest attention and enlist discussion; it broke out like

a rash over the face of current literature, and for a while was epidemic; it was simply a symptom, merely one feature of a perfectly consistent and strictly logical progress from the principle involved in this new idea of the divine immanence, and the end is not yet. The progressives tell us :

“We are gaining along the heights of faith broader views of redemption in which we may hope to comprehend and harmonize the new scientific truths of the correlation of all things, and the laws of the development of the universe.” “

God's grace is only one department of natural law, one phase merely of the universal process; and the whole race, as a race, under the influence of this great natural law, sweeps on as a part of a grand cosmic development through æons of ages towards some far-off, divine event, undefined as yet by this theology, but having, in my judgment, apparently but one logical issue, viz., annihilation for countless myriads of the human race, with some sort of a beatification for the comparatively few favored ones whose happy lot it shall be finally to form the ultimate crown of the infinite series in the measureless future! This seems the only logical result; but the logical and theological are not always absolutely identical, and “along the heights” of the latter I sometimes seem to catch fugitive glimpses of views which squint towards a species of restorationism or universalism, as a result of the all-embracing love of the immanent God.

Here ends our survey of the field as a whole; and our deliberate verdict upon the scheme in its entirety, its inherent nature, and its logical results, must be that nothing but the pale ghost of a spiritualized pantheism stands between it and the doom of a blank atheism. This conviction begets hope within us; our age has no

place for atheism, nor do we think pantheism in any form can long be popular.

Following this general summary, I single out for more particular emphasis in detail the developments of this theology in several capital directions :

I. *The Doctrine of the Divine Fatherhood.*

They charge the conservative theology with obscuring the fatherhood of God, and they claim the honor of rescuing this doctrine from such obscuration and of bringing it afresh and prominently before the world. They institute a comparison between the earlier Greek theology and the Latin, alleging the latter to be harsher, sterner, more scholastic, less spiritual, and they assert that under its domination the fatherhood has been buried in the sovereignty.

I judge that there may be possibly some plausibility at least in this charge; it is altogether likely that Latin theology lays more stress on the sovereignty than on the fatherhood. It is the distinguishing characteristic, and we have been accustomed hitherto to consider it equally the distinguishing glory, of Calvinistic theology that beyond any other and beyond all other it emphasized the sovereignty of God. This more than anything else has given to Calvinism its strength and strenuousness, its sturdiness and persistence, its reverence for God, and its regard for man made in God's image; it is this that makes it fear God so supremely that it fears naught beside him, it is this that teaches a submission to God so humble and so utter as to leave no room for submission to aught beneath him.

That God is the Father it has always taught, taught clearly, taught constantly, taught consistently, but it has taught that he is sovereign first, then father; a sovereign who is also a father, rather than a father who

is also a sovereign. There is much in this order, so much that it colors the whole of theology; this, moreover, is the Scripture order.

The difference between the old theology and the new is not that the latter teaches the fatherhood more clearly, but that it broadens it more widely; not that it emphasizes it more strongly, but that it extends it more unlimitedly. When, therefore, the representatives of the current theology charge that conservative orthodoxy "obscurer" the fatherhood, let it be understood distinctly that what they really mean is that it *limits* the fatherhood; and this is what "an increasing frankness" and "a deepening sincerity" ought to say. Let me add here that in such limitation it simply follows the explicit and uniform teaching of the Holy Scriptures.

According to the new theology the fatherhood is broadened until it embraces the whole human race, as a race; all mankind are the children of God. There is a general, vague sense in which this is true, but not at all in the sense in which the new theology teaches. One of their most eminent representatives declares:

"Man as man is God's child, and the sin of the man consists in perpetually living as if it were false. It is the sin of the heathen, and what is your mission but to tell him that he is God's child and not living up to his privilege?"

Concerning this so-called development, I have space for only two remarks:

1. In this boasted extension of the relation, all that ever made it precious has been developed out of it. If, to borrow the language of the advocates of this view, the heathen bowing down to stocks and stones is as really the child of God as he whom the new theology calls "the conscious child" of God, then *quoad* the fatherhood the whole difference is purely subjective; so far as

the objective fact is concerned, the most degraded and debased heathen and the humblest, devoutest saint stand in the sight of God on the same level, save in the matter of illumination; this is what their extension of the doctrine means, *if it means anything different from what conservative theology has been teaching from time immemorial*. But if it does mean this, then their extension of the doctrine has entirely done away with the fatherhood in any true and proper sense by reducing in practically to the creatorship.

2. My second remark is that the whole teaching of Scripture is definitely and decisively against this palpable absurdity.

The word of God nowhere proclaims this a privilege common to man as man, but one bestowed on man as a believer and upon the inexorable condition of his faith; no man enters into it by his natural birth, but by a spiritual birth, a being born again; he is not created a child in Adam, but recreated a child in Christ Jesus.

Consider, *e. g.*, the Scriptures relied upon by our progressive brethren as sustaining their view. Gal. iii. 26-29:

“26. For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.

“27. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

“28. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

“29. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise.”

Even the most cursory exegesis of that passage demonstrates infallibly:

(1), That the “all” addressed are professed believers in Christ; to such are the words spoken, not to man as man, nor even to Jew as Jew.

(2), They are said distinctly to be the children of God "by faith in Christ Jesus"; not by virtue of birth into a sanctified race, nor by virtue of the historic fact of an incarnation or generic result of it, nor yet by virtue of the fact of the fatherhood of God, but by their faith in Christ Jesus.

(3), It is a class who have "put on Christ" by a baptism into him; uniformly in the Scriptures a spiritual baptism.

(4), And by virtue of such *personal* union with Christ this faith, baptism, enduement, nullifies all distinctions of race, sex, and caste; such as have experienced it become thereby and therefrom "one in Christ Jesus," what they never were, and never could have been by nature.

(5), This oneness is solely from Christ and solely *in* him; he is at once the source and the sphere of its operation.

(6), As such they are "Abraham's seed," not Adam's; *i. e.*, an *elect seed*; and they are "heirs according to the promise," a promise made not to mankind, but to one elect family of mankind.

(7), Those who are "Christ's" are heirs, and only those.

The language could not have been more explicit, emphatic, and effective if it had been constructed expressly to refute the very error it is cited to sustain.

John i. 11, 12, is another passage referred to as supporting the view:

"11. He came unto his own, and his own received him not."

"12. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name."

We are told in comment:

"They were his own, but they wanted power to become his own. Draw a distinction, then, between being the child of God and realizing it."

Now, in what sense they were "his own" when he came to them? Does it mean that they were the sons of God? Were they the sons of God when they rejected him? (See Jno. viii. 38-44.) Was there no difference between Annas and Caiaphas on the one hand, and Peter and John on the other, save that the latter had power to realize that they were sons, whereas the former, *though as really sons*, had not power to realize the fact? Such would seem to be the content of the comment; but note:

"He came unto his own (race), but his own (race) received him not (as the Christ or Messiah), but as many as received him, to *them* gave he power (*ἐξουσία* not *δύναμις*) to become the sons of God;" not to realize that they were sons, but to become such; and this *ἐξουσία* "right, authority, privilege," is expressly here, as elsewhere, limited to those that believe in his name, exactly the same truth taught in the previous passage; by faith they *become* sons of God, what they were not, and could not have been, before they believed. Once more; James i. 18, is quoted, "Of his own will begat he us by the word of truth," and then it is added, "But remember, it is a truth; true whether you believe it or not; true whether you are baptized or not."

The obvious assumption underlying this comment being, that by "truth" in the Scripture text James means the truth of the divine fatherhood, as referred to in the comment, though this is so palpable a perversion as hardly to consist with common honesty in a commentator. "The word of truth," in the text, most evidently means the word of God, regularly referred to as the instrumental agency of the new birth. James does not teach in that text that men are brought by the truth of the divine fatherhood to realize that they are sons, but that sons are *begotten* by the gospel. This text would seem, from

the very plainness of the figure used, to be beyond the possibility of misconstruction; it ought not to be necessary to emphasize, to any considerable extent, that one could not be a child before he was begotten.

The new theology is very happy in some things, but exegesis is not its forte.

II. *One of the most Significant Departures of the New Theology is Seen in the Emphasis it Places on the Incarnation.*

As between the incarnation and the atonement, conservative theology has always laid chief stress on the latter, regarding the incarnation, in its relation to the atonement, as a means to an end; God the Son becoming the incarnate Christ in order that he might render the atonement. "Forasmuch, then, as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; *that through death* he might destroy him that hath the power of death, that is the devil."

The new theology reverses the emphasis of the old, and lays its chief stress on the incarnation; its writers have very little to say of the atonement, and that little so exceedingly vague that it is utterly impossible to discover, with any satisfying exactness, just what their conception of the atonement is; so far as their allusions go, they indicate, in my judgment, a Socinian conception. They write much as though they believed the incarnation to be the natural, logical, inevitable crown of a revealing process; that it would have occurred even had there been no sin to atone for. As one says: "That the incarnation of the Son of God was also intimately connected with the laws of God as they are revealed in outward nature, that his manifestation in the flesh was part of an immutable, eternal purpose."

One of the very latest exponents of this school prophe-

sies that in the improved theology of the future "the incarnation will not be an expedient, but a consummation." This phrase is exceedingly significant, not an expedient, but a consummation! not a means to fulfil some divine purpose, of which it was the necessary antecedent condition, but the final flower of a past process long unfolding through the ages. Mark it, it is not the atonement that is the consummation, but the incarnation. And of what is the incarnation a consummation? Why, evidently, of revelation; Christ is viewed thus not as the redeemer of man, but the revealer of God; here is the force of the epigrammatic contrast between expedient and consummation; he is the prophet, not the priest. Here you have the genesis and the genius of the whole soteriology of the school, its informing spirit. This rightly apprehended and properly appreciated also explains its remarkable affin' with certain hoary old heresies anent the person of Christ. This is why Unitarianism, *e. g.*, has been so ready to applaud the movement, and so prompt to claim its representatives.

The new theology lays its emphasis on the birth, not on the death; the manger is its focal point, not the cross—the dreamy, poetic sentimentalism of the three orient visitors at the cradle, rather than the awestruck group around the cross that watched the divine tragedy enacting between a darkening heaven and a shuddering earth.

To a reflecting mind, that this is a clear reversal of the Scripture emphasis is evident :

1. The word of God teaches that Christ came to die. This is one distinctive feature that, amid much that is common to humanity, differentiates his birth from that of all the rest of the sons of men, *viz.*: that whereas in the case of every other human being death is but the

fatal catastrophe that puts summary arrest on all the plans and purposes of earthly life, in his case it was the fulfilment of all its plans and purposes, the crown and the consummation of the whole, the accomplishment unto which and until which he was straitened. When he cried out, "It is finished," he meant not that his life was ended, but that its purpose was accomplished, its mission fulfilled. He came literally to die, his life was in order to his death.

2. Beginning with the Acts, we find the apostles plainly ignorant of this great development. The incarnation yields to the atonement, and the death of Christ, in its purpose and effect, becomes the great burden of apostolic preaching. Little is said of the life as compared with the place given to the death; this is too patent to need enlarging upon; indeed, a recent writer of the new school marks this, and himself calls attention to it, and construes it as a mark of inferiority, indicating rather a doctrinal departure than a doctrinal development, and he depreciates the apostolic preaching on that account. His criticism serves at least to make one thing clear; either the apostles have "departed," or the new theology has; as between the two, I am frank to say that I prefer to "depart" and be with the apostles.

3. So dominant was Christ's death in apostolic doctrine, that the very words, "cross of Christ," became virtually synonymous with the word gospel. This was what Paul preached; it was this that Paul gloried in; he determined not to know anything save Christ crucified.

Had the new theology's conception prevailed then, such phraseology could never in the world have become current. This apostolic emphasis of the death of Christ, so decided, so uniform, is absolutely fatal to this new view of the incarnation; aye, more, it is a complete reversal of it.

III. *Of all the Alleged Improvements Proffered by the Current Theology, the Most Pleasing and Plausible is that which Pleads for a Christocentric Theology.*

Its rallying cry is "Back to Christ!" which certainly has much to commend it to the devout. Were the phrase slightly changed, and "Close to Christ," or even "Closer to Christ" substituted, I should have less fault to find; but the words back to Christ imply that conservative theology has departed from Christ, illustrating a feature common to all their claims, viz., that every claim is, on its obverse, a charge. As I deny the charge I challenge the phrase. The true character of this rallying cry and its far-reaching significance become evident when we discover that in the usage of its advocates it applies not to the theology of the seventeenth century only, as they call it, but also to that of the first century. It is urged not against John Calvin alone, but also against John Calvin's great forerunner in Calvinism, the Apostle Paul, and we are urged to go back from Paul to Christ; this fact should give us pause, lest we find ourselves invited to go not back *to* Christ, but to go back *of* Christ, whither I believe not a few of the new theologians have already gone.

The allegation is made that the orthodox theology puts an exaggerated emphasis, lays undue stress on sin; hence the new theology calls the Calvinistic system a sincentric, rather than a Christocentric theology. They urge that sin is at most but an incident or an accident in the nature and history of man, that it is not at all of the essence of man, so to speak, and, therefore, to make all theology turn on the doctrine of sin is to convert a mere accident into the very essence of truth, determinative of the whole system.

This objection has a very plausible sound, and the assumption of philosophic terms gives it the appearance

of force, just as the semi-scientific jargon it is fond of using gives it weight often with the popular mind; but that it is only plausible we think is easily demonstrable to any thoughtful hearer.

1. Admit, if you please, the charge that the conservative theology is sincentric, it is only so because the Bible is, and it is not more so than the Bible. The word of God might be entitled, Man's Ruin and God's Remedy. It reveals in the very beginning man's initial sin, and from that point, from Genesis to Revelation, it is a history of the conflict advertised in the protevangelium between the seed of the woman and the serpent; this I conceive to be its prime purpose, all else is but incidental and ancillary to this the main object of the book: to trace the development of God's redeeming purpose through all ages and dispensations until the volume ends, as it began, in a paradise, descending from God out of heaven prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. In the very beginning man became a sinner; from that moment all his relations to God were those of a sinner, all his approaches to God were the approaches of a sinner, all of God's revelations to him were revelations to a sinner, all of God's dealings with him were dealings with a sinner. Any theology that did not take this into account would be false to fact, and hence unfaithful to truth. If this constitutes a theology sincentric, then sincentric it must be. If man be such a sinner as the word of God declares him to be, then nothing short of this theology can suit him, because nothing short of it can save him. What sort of theology man would have had had he never sinned, we do not know, and we are not greatly concerned to inquire; it is a condition that confronts us, not a theory; conservative theology meets that condition and meets it exactly as the Bible does.

2. The contrast between the essential and the accidental is mere jugglery with philosophic terms. The implication is that traditional theology converts the accidental into the essential, an implication manifestly absurd upon its very face. That this is so, is proven by the fact that orthodox theology teaches that in the beginning man was without sin, and that in the end he shall be again free from it, that the perfect man is a sinless man. This is the very *raison d' être* of its so-called sincentric theology.

When our enterprising brethren lay such stress on the "incidental" character of sin we could retort by reminding them that the incidental may be exceedingly influential; *e. g.*, a prosperous, active, independent mechanic falls from a scaffold and is picked up insensible; he recovers, to be a cripple for life; he must lie prone upon his back and be tended like an infant, his whole locomotor system is paralyzed; he may live fifty years afterward, sound and well in every other respect, nevertheless his whole after-life will be determined and controlled by that incident, and it is of little weight to say that such a condition is not of the "essence" of the man, and ought, therefore, not to be determinative of his future; it is such, nevertheless. Just so the Bible tells us that in the youth of the world mankind suffered a fall, and that by it his moral backbone was broken, that he has been ever since a confirmed cripple—aye, even worse, by far, it teaches that this "mere incident" spiritually *slew* him!

3. Any attempted contrast between a Christocentric theology and a sincentric seems to me singularly out of place. The truth is, that a theology will be really Christocentric just in proportion as it is sincentric; no system can properly exalt Christ that underestimates

sin. No system has ever honored the Saviour as Calvinism has, and this plausible pretense of the new theology sounds like the mock homage of the reed sceptre and the crown of thorns. Calvinistic theology, however, strictly speaking, is neither sincentric nor yet Christocentric; it is theocentric; for while recognizing the absolute sovereignty and mediatorial supremacy of our adorable Lord, it looks forward to the ultimate time "when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father. . . . And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all."

IV. *The Current Popular Theology gives a large place to what it calls the Christian Consciousness.*

Schleiermacher maintained that religion resides in the sensibility, not in the intelligence, nor in the will, nor in the active powers of man; that it is a form of feeling, which he specified more particularly as a sense of absolute dependence. This was the fundamental position of his theology, or philosophy, rather; for his system is more properly the latter than the former. This sense of dependence he declared to be the essential principle of all religion in every form, from the lowest up to the highest. How this sense of dependence will express itself will depend mainly upon the degree of culture in the individual or the community; the more enlightened and pure a person is, the more will he be able to appreciate what is involved in this sense of dependence upon God. All men have naturally this sense of dependence, or God-consciousness, as it is sometimes called, lying dormant, to be awakened, developed, cultured and illuminated by various agencies and influences. When this religious consciousness, or God-consciousness, has been awakened,

developed, cultivated to a certain stage, it becomes then the Christian consciousness.

One of his admirers among the representatives of the current theology says :

“Schleiermacher spoke not only of a religious consciousness in man whose primary characteristic was the feeling of dependence upon God, but also of what he called the Christian consciousness, the product of specifically Christian influences during the ages of the church. The fact of a Christ, his teaching, and the events of his life had entered into history, becoming inwrought, as it were, into the consciousness, as if an essential part of its furniture. For this reason the history of the church became the continuation of a revealing process, in which the action of God, as the indwelling Spirit, perpetuated and developed the work of Christ.”

And the admiring follower speaks of this view as “redeeming the study of history.”

The results of such views cannot be better expressed than in the terse but comprehensive words of Dr. Hodge :

“Christianity subjectively considered is the intuitions of good men, as occasioned and determined by the appearance of Christ. Objectively considered, or in other words, Christian theology, is the logical analysis and scientific arrangement and elucidation of the truths involved in those intuitions.”

According to this basal principle of Schleiermacher, Christianity is a strictly natural development, just as really so as is agriculture; the latest forms of Christian faith bearing very much the same relation to the fetichism of the heathen that the agricultural implements of this century bear to the crude devices of primitive ages. As has already been said, Christianity was as closely connected with heathenism as with Judaism; so far as inherent character is concerned “there was no more affinity with it in Judaism than in the higher forms of heathen thought.”

Such views of the nature and the origin of Christianity necessarily take from inspiration all its distinctive character and rob it of all that is extraordinary by reducing it to mere illumination, the same in kind as that shared by all believers; a mere intuition or understanding of truth determined in degree by religious experience, depending for its efficiency and its value largely upon the character, the circumstances, the opportunities, the advantages, of the particular individual in each case.

The Scriptures have, and can have, no real authority as a rule of faith; their chief value, indeed their only practical value, is to stimulate men to strive after the experience of the religious life of its writers, and thus to attain, each for himself, a like intuition of divine things.

Any one familiar with the writings of the current popular theology will at once recognize the exceeding close kinship, the remarkable similarity, between the Christian consciousness, which plays so prominent a part in its system, and the views of Schleiermacher. Its advocates use the term somewhat vaguely; sometimes as if it were very nearly synonymous with human reason, generally as though it were equivalent to the common consent of the religious sensibility of universal christendom, a combination of reason and feeling, the human heart and the human intellect under the illuminating and developing influences of God's grace and providence; and this alleged common consent, as an intuition, is invested with the *semper, ubique, ab omnibus* attributes which constitute it in the judgment of its advocates a court of final and supreme resort.

For example, we read:

“We can go further and claim, not only that the Christian consciousness is the organ of increasing knowledge, but also that all statements and interpretations of truth, to be accepted, must

commend themselves to the Christian conscioussess. . . . Its function, then, may be considered both the development and the testing of progressive theology.

“The Christian consciousness of to-day, which is itself a product of the gospel, cannot be contradicted by the gospel. Hence any theories which claim to be confirmed by the Bible, yet against which Christian sentiment protests, should not be accepted.¹

“The mind accepts revelation because it accepts the *substance* of revelation. . . . The reason believes the revelation because *in itself* it is reasonable. . . . It is as legitimate for the reason to pass judgment upon the *contents* of revelation, as upon the grounds of receiving it. . . . It enters into the material of revelation and plants its feet there.”

The author's own emphasis of certain words in the preceding paragraph relieves the necessity of comment on the part of the present speaker; nor need I pause here to show that, to all intents and purposes, this view of the character and office of the Christian consciousness puts the current theology practically and squarely on the platform of Schleiermacher.

It is evident that the Bible is divested of all authority; it is accepted only so far as it commends itself to the individual Christian consciousness of the reader; anything that he considers unreasonable, he refuses; anything not in accord with his sentiment, he rejects; the obvious, the inevitable result, is, that every man becomes virtually the maker of his own Bible!

I shall dismiss this doctrine of the Christian consciousness with two remarks:

¹ But how would this application of the very same logic do?

“The Christian consciousness of to-day, which is itself a product of the gospel, cannot be contradicted by the gospel.” *Hence any sentiment which claims to be the Christian consciousness, yet contradicts the Bible, is thereby proven spurious and should not be accepted.*

I. I deny its very existence. It is a mere figment of the imagination. It is constantly referred to, and deferred to, as if it were a universal and unanimous consensus of the Christian mind and heart, an infallible authority, an ultimate appeal; whereas this vaunted Christian consciousness is at best nothing more than the clamorous claim of a comparatively small coterie of self-confident men, who remind one of a hopeless minority in a deliberative body, that strives to make up in noise what it lacks in numbers; the fussy few who are the ecclesiastical Ishmaelites of their respective denominations. Can any man doubt that these self-styled "progressives" are an insignificant minority when compared with the great body of conservative believers? Can there be any question of the fact that the common consent of Christian feeling, if there be such a thing, is against their views?

If I be answered that the consciousness referred to is not that of the great body of ignorant believers, but rather the verdict of the learned, those qualified to understand such matters, my reply would be, first: That this vacates virtually the position entirely, such an answer is a surrender. But, second: not even can this surrender avail, for there is among this limited class no such unanimity of assent as is assumed. We have the Christian consciousness in Andover and Union (New York) Seminaries asserting one thing, while the Christian consciousness in Princeton, McCormick, Union, (Virginia), Columbia, Louisville, Clarksville, etc., asserts exactly the contrary.

You find this *semper, ubique, ab omnibus* intuition most confidently asserting certain things through the lips of our very progressive brother Lyman Abott in Brooklyn, and immediately the Congregational Council, of which he is a member, holds a meeting and gravely informs

the world that brother Abbott's Christian consciousness is not their Christian consciousness. Now, then, it becomes a very practical and a very puzzling question, *whose Christian consciousness is authority?* And in this question lies the refutation of the whole absurdity, which brings me to my second remark :

2. The doctrine is not a figment only, it is a folly.

The criticism must be arrested here, not for lack of material but for want of time.

In my opening sentence I stated that when the present stage of our discussion should have been reached, the relation between the current theology and the Westminster symbols would be self-evident, and that the part the latter must play in the needs of the future would be implicit in the comparison. If only the smallest measure of success has attended my effort at a review of the current theology, this relation is now seen to be clearly that of contrast decided and complete, embracing sources, methods and results; there is scarcely a material point of agreement between the two; if one is right, the other is radically and comprehensively wrong. Let the new use the dialect of the old as it will, its meaning and intent, its spirit and motive, must soon become evident; the trade-marks of the old cannot much longer accredit it in the esteem of any save of such as are so blind that they will not see. We trust that their revision and restatement will keep pace with their progress and will honestly reflect that progress. We crave a speedy formulation of their faith, one that shall fairly and fully register their advance; let them leave their vagueness and give us something definite; abandon the negative, the destructive, and assume the positive, undertake the constructive; let them put forth their revised symbols. We

heartily commend for their consideration the following as the first question and answer in their improved catechism :

“ What is the chief end of God? ”

God’s chief end is to glorify man and to develop him forever.”

If such be the relation between the two systems, the only position consistently open to the Westminster theology is that of unyielding opposition ; there is no possibility of harmony, there ought to be no place for compromise ; as long as it is faithful to the duty of contending earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints, so long must it resist the advance of this modern type of theology. Like its greatest representative, it is “ set for the defence of the gospel.” Its coherence of thought ; its compactness of logical structure ; its definiteness and clearness of statement ; its unswerving loyalty to God’s word ; its constant resort to that word as its ultimate appeal, its final and infallible authority ; its exaltation of God as sovereign ; its humbling influence on the pride and prejudice of man ; its emphasis of the doctrines of divine grace—all fit it to serve both as a test of truth and as a bulwark against error, at once the safe guide and the safeguard of pure, scriptural doctrine.

It is easy to see that when the authority of the Scriptures is discredited and every man taught to mould his theology solely according to his tastes, his sentiments, his prejudices, there can be no assurance for the future ; there remains no standard but individual preference, and not only theology, but even morals are at the mercy of mere whim ; every man becomes a law unto himself, and this in religion and morals, as everywhere else, is anarchy, and anarchy is chaos.

The Westminster theology stands prepared to present

a solid front against such error; no other system has the inherent force to resist this rising tide as the Westminster has; it stands, therefore, to-day invested with an importance perhaps transcending all present possible appreciation, for should this new theology win the day there is danger that the world may be ultimately orphaned of its God as it is fast being robbed of its Bible.

The part, then, that Calvinistic theology must play in the needs of the future is that of a granite ledge against the insidious encroachments of a troubled sea casting up mire and dirt; its office is to say, with the voice of that God, whose humble mouth-piece it has been privileged to prove in many a stormy period of the past,

“HITHERTO SHALT THOU COME, BUT NO FURTHER; AND HERE SHALL THY PROUD WAVES BE STAYED.”