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REVIEW SECTION.

I—A SYMPOSIUM ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.

NO. III.

BY PROF. TIMOTHY DWIGHT, YALE COLLEGE.

A RECENT writer on the Epistle to the Romans has declared it to be in reality an inspired system of theology. This view has been held, substantially, by many theologians, and, under their influence, by very many private and unlearned readers. Accordingly, the formal and full statement of doctrine in all parts of the Christian system has been sought and found in it; if not indeed in the terms of theological science, at least with such distinctness as to be easily convertible into those terms. The Apostle has thus been conceived of, as it were, as sitting down, with the comprehensive survey of all religious truth and the calm outlook upon the ages which are supposed to characterize philosophers in the schools, to prepare a treatise upon Christianity as it had been revealed to him for the instruction and guidance of mankind. I cannot regard the Epistle as having any such character or purpose as this, or its author as having been in any such condition of mind. The Pauline writings are letters, not treatises. They are instinct with the life and thought of the time at which they were written. They set forth truths and duties, indeed, which bear equally upon men of all generations. But they are as individual and special in their relations, as directly occasioned by the demands of the hour and the circumstances of particular churches, as closely connected with existing controversies in which the author was involved, as truly affected in their phraseology and course of argument by the thoughts then interesting and occupying the minds of the Christian community, as any letters that have ever appeared in the world. We see in them, as we pass in review the progress of the years which they cover, the change in the sentiment and discussions of believers or unbelievers, as clearly as we do when we move along the course of our

never more can sin enter there to cast down any of that glorious host to perdition. "God hath gathered together in Christ all things in heaven and earth, and by him *all things consist.*" He is the great magnet of the skies. The exhibition of His love in the manger and on the cross, and the glory that has followed His sufferings charm and fix the heart of the whole heavenly host. They listen with delight to the song of salvation, and, as the Bride, the Lamb's wife, sits down with Him on His throne, these children of the bride-chamber rejoice with exceeding great joy.

Now, therefore, as the blessedness of Christ and of all ransomed souls, and of all holy angels exceeds our comprehension, even so the love of Christ, from which that blessedness flows, as water from a fountain, or as light from the sun, passeth knowledge. Its goings forth were from eternity. It gleamed upon the world like the dayspring at Bethlehem; it shone with noontday splendor on Calvary; it will shine with a brightness above the sun after all the lights of the firmament are quenched. Here in this world we catch its brightness and taste its sweetness. It comes to us in the joy of pardoned sin, in the grace that comforts us according to our day; in the hope of heaven that gilds the darkness of the tomb. But in heaven it will minister to us more and more abundantly forever. There we shall breathe an atmosphere of love, and drink at the living fountain of love, and rejoice in the eternal sunlight of love, and see all divine and human perfections bound together and blended in the harmonies of love. And when for myriads of ages our growing capacities have been filled with this fulness of God, we shall still confess with adoring wonder that "the love of Christ passeth knowledge."

Will this, indeed, be the experience of us all? Why should it not be? Oh, how unutterably sad is the thought that any of us will be excluded from it! and especially so when we remember that the love of Christ is not only infinite in itself, but unlimited in its in-

vitations and offers. Weary and heavy-laden souls, Christ speaks to you as He did to the multitudes who thronged about Him to hear His gracious words, saying, "Come unto me and I will give you rest." And the invitations of His love are repeated and urged home upon your hearts by ten thousand voices in earth and in heaven. For "the Spirit and the Bride say Come, and let him that heareth say Come, and whosoever will let him come."

To sin against the divine authority is bad enough, but to despise the importunities of love divine is unspeakably worse. (Heb. x: 28.) "He that despised the law of Moses died without mercy under two or three witnesses; of how much sorer punishment shall he be thought worthy who hath trodden under foot the Son of God?"

To perish under the shadow of the Cross; to go down to death passing by the gate of life; to inherit forever wrath and hatred and bitterness, because we have neglected and despised the importunities and tender appeals of love divine; to be filled eternally with the society and surroundings of the devil and his angels, because we have refused "the fulness of God"—this is a perdition which passes our comprehension, and from the experience of which may God deliver us!

OF UNCERTAINTY AND PARTIAL KNOWLEDGE.

BY LEONARD WOOLSEY BACON, IN THE WOODLAND CHURCH, PHILADELPHIA.

We know in part, and we prophesy in part.—1 Cor. xiii.: 9.

Here is enunciated one of the most uncongenial, unwelcome facts of human nature and human life, yet one of the most undeniable—a fact of which the mind is intolerant just in proportion to its own vitality and dignity, struggling against it, vainly, indeed, but ever struggling—a fact which becomes tolerable to great and noble minds only as they rise to the height of hope at which they foresee the par-

tial done away and that which is perfect come.

This fact is the condition of uncertainty, or imperfect knowledge, which is the unvarying, inexorable condition of our living in this world. It is in the nature of a wholly vigorous and healthy intellect not to be contented with this condition. Abraham Lincoln, describing his first beginnings in self-education to a friend of mine (Prof. John P. Gulliver, of Andover), said: "I never was contented, when I got an idea, until I could bound it north, and bound it east, and bound it south, and bound it west." There was a sign of mental health and vigor—a sure augury of growth and greatness. On the other hand, we do sometimes see a man settled down into an apparently comfortable contentment with not knowing anything confidently and clearly, even making it a point of pride to suggest doubts of his own on matters on which other people are well convinced, and to hold in abeyance questions which ordinary minds find to be satisfactorily settled. The fact that an ordinary mind is satisfied is a reason, or rather is a motive, with him for being in doubt and staying in doubt, for he is not an ordinary mind, but an extraordinary one; and this cool, *nil admirari* temper, never quite convinced about anything, and not in the least caring to be convinced, but quite satisfied with seeing two sides and never striking a balance between them, seems to him like the mark of a superior person. He is not at all aware that it is the symptom of a fatally diseased intellect, which has lost its appetite for knowing, and is likely, soon or late, to die of atrophy.

And now is not this a strange misfit in the economy of creation—a failure of adaptation between the course of outward nature and the mind of man—that the thing which the mind instinctively craves for itself is the one thing which, by its own nature and the nature of the world, it cannot have—full, definite, precise knowledge of things, and especially of the things which most concern itself? For this is not the

observation of Paul alone, that we know only in part and see but dimly as in a mirror; it is the confession of that great man who, above all names of men, is the apostle and high priest of positive knowledge—I mean, of course, Auguste Comte, the founder of the Positive Philosophy. His classification of the sciences* depends on this general principle, that the nearer a department of study comes to the concerns of humanity the more removed it is from the possibility of precise and complete knowledge. We can understand the mechanism of the solar system exactly, but the nervous system is too much for us. The chemistry of the rocks belongs in the simple rudiments of the science; the chemistry of vegetable life is more complicated, and as we advance to the chemistry of higher organic forms, approaching humanity, it becomes tangled in a complexity that quite baffles us. We can explain, down to the last infinitesimal, the perturbations of the planetary motions, but can not be sure about a disorder of the circulation or the digestion. And when we come to moral and social science we are further from completeness and definiteness. The elements are definite enough, but the complication of them is such as to defeat all our pretension to exact science in these studies of humanity. And why can it be that the world should be so constructed as if purposely to defeat the full and exact knowledge of man on the points that most concern him, and then that man should be made and placed in it with a nature that cannot be content with anything less? The fishes that are to swim in the gloom of sunless caverns are mercifully born without eyes. And ought man to be placed in this twilight world, where things are to be seen in part and as if dimly in a mirror, and yet equipped with faculties which ache with an unsatisfied craving unless they can be filled with exact and perfect knowledge?

This is a good and instructive question to put to ourselves, even though

* See *Cours de Philosophie Positive*, tom. I., pp. 96, 101, 102.

we may not know how to answer it. For I do not call it an answer to one perplexed question to bring other questions equally perplexed and set beside it in a class—to say, for instance, that this mystery of our condition of uncertainty or partial knowledge was no darker than the mystery of our condition of subjection to pain or to death, which are just as unnatural to us. But the whole series of these dark things, the unsolved perplexity of which is the theme of the discussions in the book of Job, is illuminated to our minds when we see them in the light of that thought, so easy to us, so far from the apprehension of Job and his friends, that we are here in training for a greater life, and that the very limitations that seem only to mar and hinder us of the very end of living are a discipline for higher ends. Taking this thought in all its largeness, lo, even the night is light about us! We begin at once to see that even ignorance, uncertainty and doubt, when imposed upon us by the manifest intent of God, may be more instructive to us, more upbuilding in that which we chiefly need, than present knowledge.

1. It is a discipline to *diligence*, this enforced, inevitable condition of uncertainty and partial knowledge. God is a most wise teacher, and in the training of His children He uses the same principles of teaching which we use in the training of our children. We put upon them the requirement and the necessity of knowing, and then we give them, not the knowledge that they seek, but the key of that knowledge; that and more beside. The act of teaching does not consist any more in imparting knowledge than it does in withholding it, in raising questions and giving no answer, but only pointing out the direction in which answers may be sought, in grammars and dictionaries, in maps, in computations, in laboratory practice. Doubtless the teacher has something to do in the way of directly imparting knowledge, but his greater function, after all, is in wisely keeping it back until it is fairly won

from him by the scholar's own effort. This is the sort of teaching that yields fruit after its kind, having its seed within itself. This is the sort of schooling that makes scholarship; the other sort, that answers all questions off-hand, never does more than to produce "persons of general information;" and a "person of general information" is a poor sort of counterfeit imitation of a scholar.

Now this wisest, highest, most skillful of human teaching is after the pattern of God's teaching, who teaches without telling; who sets alluring objects of knowledge almost within sight and within reach; who sets ajar the doors of science at the right hand and the left, as if to entice us in; who writes up all around us the invitations, "Ask and ye shall receive." "Seek and ye shall find," "Knock and it shall be opened." And the promise is never belied. No faithful seeker does seek in vain. Perhaps the thing he finds is somewhat other than he sought; many a time it has been incomparably greater than he sought, as Saul went seeking the straying asses and found a kingdom. One of the pathetic chapters in human history is the history of false science, how men sought by so-called alchemy for impossible and fantastic things—for the philosopher's stone, for the elixir of life, for the universal solvent—and found them not, but found marvelous things without number in the quest for them, and by and by found themselves at the wonderful and splendid portals of the great treasure-house of modern chemistry; how geography busied herself exploring unknown seas for a new route to Cipango and Cathay, and lo! a new continent was given as her reward; how astrology ventured out vaguely among the stars, seeking she knew not what and listening for some unknown music of the spheres, and became transfigured into astronomy, entering into the very secret place of the Creator and hearing the heavens declare the glory of God. So it is given to them that ask "full measure, pressed down and running

over," "exceeding abundantly above all they had asked or thought." But ever with what is given is something yet reserved. Each new discovery discloses new questions yet to be answered. The splendid strain of each new revelation ends with a suspended chord with which the ear cannot rest content—a dissonance of which we long to hear the resolution. So by this "illusiveness" of human knowledge, that knows only in part, and beyond the inelastic focus-distance of its vision sees so dimly and confusedly, does God discipline us continually to diligence of inquiry. For that which is true in the study of these material things is even more impressively true in the higher study of man, and duty, and God. There we are more constantly and more hopelessly confronted with perplexities that suggest no solution, which is God's way of bidding us ask and seek, as if He would say again, "Then shall ye know, if ye shall follow on to know." It is nothing against the wisdom of God's discipline to diligent inquiry if sometimes it fails through the folly of men who are subjected to it—those indolent and ignoble natures to whom the universe, with all its awful and inspiring problems, is nothing but a conundrum to be guessed at and then given up.

2. But our dim and partial knowledge is also for a discipline to *humility* and *patience*. And so good a discipline is it that they who have learned the most are commonly the humblest concerning their knowledge, for they have deepest consciousness how inadequate it is. They have so widened out the circle of their knowledge that they see all the larger circumference of the unknown that pens it in. And they have learned to be not only diligent in seeking for further knowledge, but patient in waiting for it; yes, patient when they strike against the confines of all possible knowledge, and make up the mind to hope for nothing more in that direction. For this is part of our discipline of ignorance, that running through the very midst of human life

in its most intimate, most practical concerns, is a line of questions concerning which the only progress that has been made towards answering them is this, That at last philosophy has achieved this victory over itself, that it has confessed its defeat and surrendered its effort—over one vast subject, or series of subjects, of inquiry writing up the words *No Thoroughfare*. Along the seam between will and motive, between foreknowledge and responsibility, between eternity and time, between spirit and matter, between the absolute and the conditioned, are ranged the antinomies over which the only wisdom is to despair and be patient. And that is the wisdom which after these six thousand years of discipline, theology and philosophy are only now, at last, for the last one hundred years, beginning to learn. You say that all these centuries and millenniums of philosophical and theological discussion have made no progress in solving these questions! Yes. But is it not immense progress to have learned to give them up, frankly and finally, as insoluble? And that is the progress that has been made in our century. To such good purpose has God used upon us His discipline to *humility and patience* as well as to *diligence*.

3. But, moreover, the limitation and uncertainty of our knowledge are a discipline to *charity* towards others whose knowledge is yet more narrowly limited than ours, or (more likely) whose limitations are on a different side from ours. We are vexed at their narrowness, and do not think what reason we give them or others to be vexed at ours. Probably we are none of us aware where it is that our knowledge is most limited and defective, is nearest akin to ignorance and error. Likely enough it is at the very point where we are most positive and think ourselves most clear and complete—our favorite dogma, our cherished partisan or sectarian tenet. We need, as a training in charity, to "look upon the things of others" as well as "upon our own things." That is a solemn word of Vinet, the

Swiss preacher: "The men of two hundred years hence will be looking back with astonishment of some monstrous error that was unconsciously held by the best Christians of the Nineteenth Century." A solemn word, and yet if anything is clearly taught us by the constant story of the past it is this very thing. And it is right that we should be reminded of it. But why? that we should cease to hold the truth or hold it with timorous or hesitating grasp? Nay! but that we should learn to hold the truth no longer in unrighteousness or in self-righteousness, but that we should hold the truth, and speak the truth, *in love*.

4. Will it be a hard saying to any if we add that our defect of knowledge is God's way of training us to *faith*? Surely we fall sometimes into a way of talking as if this were not so. We speak of a man of great faith, of clear and settled faith, meaning a learned, confident, definite theologian, who has surveyed and triangulated the whole field of sacred knowledge and "found out the Almighty to perfection." Eternity, Trinity, Atonement, all these are quite clear and definite to him. He has turned theology into a positive science. He acts on clear and unmistakable certainties. He is "a man of great faith." Nay, rather, he is a man, so far as this goes, of no faith at all. He has not the necessary antecedent condition of faith that should bring him to the feet of the great Teacher, that should lead him to lay his hand in the hand of the only Guide. He lacks the consciousness of ignorance and uncertainty. And you who, vexed by doubts, and uncertainties, and limitations on every hand, have been wont to say, "But for these I might believe, I would believe," learn now to speak in a happier and higher strain, and say, "In spite of these—no; *because* of these doubts, vaguenesses, misgivings, I must believe, I do believe; I commit myself to Him who is eternal wisdom, and love, and power. To whom can I go but to Him who hath the words of eternal life? Blessed be God, who

hath fenced up my way of knowledge and darkened my path, that so I might learn to feel for the leading of His hand and walk by faith, not by sight."

5. And now it cannot be needful to argue that this self-same thing, which through God hath wrought in us to diligence, to humility, to patience, to charity, to faith, is that which worketh in us to *hope* and to rejoice in the coming glory of God. It is not for always, this which is in part, even though it is expedient for us now. And it is the more expedient for us now, partly because it so manifestly is not meant to be, cannot be, must not be for always, It is "the bringing in of a better hope." It is the dimness which turns our mind toward the day-star and the coming dawn. O blessed limitations! O happy ignorance! O hunger and thirst unsatisfied, that are a continual promise of the coming time when I shall be filled! O clouds that curtain in my vision and take up my Lord out of my sight—ye are *bright* clouds! Thou impenetrable firmament, that hidest from me scenes of unutterable joy and fellowships of the blessed, arch above me still, and be not too quickly rolled away like a scroll! Be patient with me awhile, O grasping and soaring Theology, that art resolved to know all! leave me here a little in this valley, or on this humble plane of earth; and here let me learn to be diligent, and patient, and charitable towards men and trustful toward the only wise God my Savior. In this mood I can well afford to await, through my appointed days, that glorious time for which I am not yet prepared, but for which God is preparing me, when that which is perfect shall have come and these things which are in part shall be done away—when I shall see face to face and know even as I am known.

He brings his people into a wilderness that He may speak comfortably to them: He casts them into a fiery furnace, but it is that they may have more of His company.—T. BROOKS.