

Notes Editorial and Critical

The Fundamental Fallacies in Present-Day "Thinking"*

I. Is There Any Truth? If so, How Can it be Certified?

Is there any Verifiable Truth?

Pilate's skeptical question is in the air to-day as probably never before since he sneeringly, or despairingly, put it to Jesus.

"What is Truth?"

And perhaps the man who is the readiest to

say, "Oh yes, of course there is such a thing as truth!" is as ready to quote the philological dictum of Horne Tooke as if it were an axiom, "Truth is what one troweth" (or thinketh), thereby making it a mere matter of individual opinion. And if further pressed with some concrete case that brings home the inconsistency of such a view, he is ready to go further and add the assertion, "*One man's opinion is just as good as another's*". To this the retort discourteous may be necessary: "You are right, for no man's opinion is worth anything if it be a *mere opinion*". If the response come, as it is pretty sure to come: "*Every man has a right to his opinion!*" To this again, acknowledging the man's right of eminent domain in the premises, it may be said: "Yes, that is true; the idiot has a right to his idiocy, but that does not make it a valuable or marketable asset".

Just here is the logical pit—made bottomless by knocking out all basis for settled truth on any subject—in which the so-called "thought" of the present time is plumping the so-called "thinkers". As a consequence most of the "thinking" sent out to the world in printed form—shall we say ninety-nine hundredths of it?—is valueless or, worse than that, positively vicious.

* The substance of this paper appeared in "The Bible Student and Teacher" for March, 1904 (the third number issued in the present Series). We have been urgently requested to reprint it as specially applicable to the present situation, and as the circulation was then probably not more than 500 we have consented to do so.—Editor.

The principle that underlies the "new thinking" is the autonomy of the mind.

That brilliant and fascinating writer, Auguste Sabatier, late Dean of the Protestant Faculty

of Theology in the University of Paris, formulated and advocated it in his early work, "Outlines of a Philosophy of Religion based upon "Psychology and History". In his later work, "Religions of Authority and the Religion of the Spirit"—to the preface to which he affixed his name August, 1899, just before his death, and which five years later was given to the American public, in a translation, through the press of McClure, Phillips & Co.—he applied the principle in an elaborate attempt to sweep away all other basis of authority for Christianity as a religion. At his hands Romanism and Protestantism, infallible Church and infallible Bible, fare alike, neither furnishing any secure foundation on which to rest.

In Sabatier's view, a deadly conflict is on, between the experimental method which belongs to science and the method of authority which is followed in the traditional religion; and the absolute discomfiture of the latter is assured. He tells us how "this *infantile method* was vanquished on the day when Galileo and Bacon opposed to it in the realm of physics the method of observation and experiment, and when Descartes, in philosophy", subjected all traditional ideas to a provisional doubt. And this is his further utterance, in which he unfolds his view of the autonomy of mind:

"It was an intellectual revolution of incalculable importance, which put an end to the long minority of the human mind by asserting its autonomy. To say that the mind is autonomous is not to hold that it

the Bible, in the immortality of the soul, in eternal punishment, in the atoning death of the Lord Jesus; and they cried after, if finally they might attain, the holiness of God. They were not critics—they were great workers; not grammarians—but generous givers; not pedants—but unsparing in benevolence and sacrifice.

I judge every religion by the men it makes, and so judged, the Bible has no need to be ashamed of its stalwarts and its heroes. Shall I offend scholars and critics, grammarians and pedants, if I frankly say that merely as such they have next to nothing to do with the Bible? That the Bible

has little or nothing to say to them in their academical capacity? The Bible seeks and finds the heart, talks to the spirit when in the deepest humility, goes out after the soul in its penitence and mortal hunger. When the reader is least a grammarian he may be nearest the spirit of the book. "Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, to this man will I look, to the man that is of a humble and a contrite heart, and that trembleth at My word". To "tremble" is better than to parse; in a deep and large sense salvation is not of grammar, else then only grammarians could have a high place in heaven.

The Article "Parable", from "A Dictionary of the Bible"

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A parable is a method of speech in which moral or religious truth is illustrated from the analogy of common experience. The comparison may be expressed, as by the word like, or be implied. The limits between the parable and simile and metaphor are not well defined. Often there is scarcely any difference, except that the simile and metaphor are short and the parable comparatively long. "Ye are the light of the world" is a metaphor; "like a lamb dumb before his shearer" is a simile; but "the kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till it was all leavened", is a parable (Matt. xiii. 33).

The parable has certain advantages.

One is, that this means of conveying truth makes it adhere to the memory much more than a plain didactic statement would do. For instance, no didactic statement as to the willingness of our Lord to receive penitent sinners would have had an effect at all equal to that produced by the parable of the prodigal son (Luke xv. 11-32).

A second advantage in a parable is that, when it is needful for a prophet or a preacher to censure a powerful personage, who will not allow himself to be directly found fault with, it is possible by a skilfully framed parable to make him not merely listen patiently, but condemn him-

self before he discovers that it is himself he is condemning. This was done with much skill by the prophet Nathan when he went to reprove David for his great sin in the matter of Uriah the Hittite.

The following are the chief parables in the Old Testament: the trees anointing a king (Judg. ix. 8-20), the ewe lamb (2 Sam. xii. 1-14), the widow, one of whose two sons slew the other (2 Sam. xiv. 4-20), the soldier who let his captive escape (1 Kin. xx. 35-42), the thistle which asked for the cedar's daughter as a wife for his son (2 Kin. xiv. 9-11), the vineyard (Is. v. 1-7), the two eagles and a vine (Ezek. xvii. 1-10), the lion's whelps (xix. 1-9), Oholah and Oholibah (xxiii. 1-49), the boiling pot (xxiv. 1-14).

An important part of our Lord's teaching was by means of parables; and when Scripture parables are spoken of, generally those of Jesus are meant. Christ used the parabolic form of teaching at every period of his public ministry (Mark iii. 23; Luke vi. 39; vii. 40-50); but there came a time when a distinct change took place and he gave a larger place to parables in his public instruction (Matt. xiii. 3; Mark iv. 2).

Two reasons are assigned why he adopted to such an extent this method of teaching. One given by Matthew is that it was

prophesied (Matt. xiii. 34, 35; cp. Ps. xli. 4; lxxviii. 2, 3). The other, emanating from our Lord, explains the former. He used parables because it was not given unto his auditors to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, since seeing they saw not and hearing they did not understand (Matt. xiii. 10-16). This statement of Jesus has been interpreted to mean that he clothed the truths of the kingdom in images in order to make them more intelligible to his hearers and to impress them indelibly on their memory. But this was true of a certain class of hearers only and in many cases, even in respect to them, only after the parable had been explained.

Jesus rather meant that his auditors generally were unprepared to hear and heartily believe the spiritual truths of the kingdom; and while the time had come to teach these doctrines to his followers who were to carry on his work after his departure (Mark iv. 33, 34), the truth was henceforth hidden from those who had heard without repentance, was cautiously uttered in the hearing of obdurate enemies who were watching to seize upon his words and employ them against him, and was veiled from the fickle multitude who would refuse to listen to his words if they perceived the full import of them (Mark iv. 11, 12).

With perhaps only one exception (Matt. xviii. 23-35), the recorded parables, which were spoken after this form of instruction became prominent in Jesus' public teaching, fall into three groups:

I. Eight illustrating the nature of the kingdom of heaven (Matt. xiii. 1-50; Mark iv. 26-29), followed by one by way of application (Matt. xiii. 51, 52). These were spoken during one day on the shore of the sea of Galilee (xiii. 1, 53). They contain five fundamental truths: 1. Sower and seed: the varied reception of the gospel by different classes of hearers. 2. Tares and

wheat: evil springs up among the good. 3. Seed growing secretly, mustard seed, and leaven: growth of the church imperceptibly, externally, internally. 4. Hidden treasure, and pearl of great price: value of the kingdom, necessity of sacrifice to obtain it. 5. Net gathering all kinds of fish: mixed condition of the visible church until the end of the world.

II. Nineteen, or thereabout, illustrating the kingdom of heaven in the individual life (Luke x. 25-xix., except xiii. 18-21).

Most of them, if not all, were delivered after Christ's departure from Galilee, in the interval of six months between the feast of tabernacles and his last passover. They include the parables of the good Samaritan, the friend at midnight, the rich man and his barns, the waiting servants, the shut door, the chief seat, the supper and excuses for not attending it, the lost sheep, the lost money, the prodigal son, the unjust steward, the rich man and Lazarus, the servant's duty, the importunate widow, the Pharisee and the publican, and the pounds.

III. Five or, with Matt. xxiv. 32-35, six, which were delivered during the last week at Jerusalem, and point to judgment and the consummation of the kingdom. The attitude of those called is illustrated by the parables of the two sons and the wicked husbandmen (Matt. xxi. 29-46); and the need of the wedding garment, of watchfulness, and of fidelity, is shown by the parables of the marriage of the king's son, the ten virgins, and the five talents (Matt. xxii. 1-14; xxv. 1-30).

In interpreting the parables, rigid inquiry should be made into the circumstances in which each was delivered at first, and the doctrine or argument which it was intended primarily to convey. This done, it is at once seen that the teaching of the parable is of universal application, suited for all analogous circumstances and for all succeeding time.