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FAITH IN CHRIST AND FAITH IN DOCTRINE

Compared and Contrasted.

The Baccalaureate Sermon,

PREACHED BEFORE

THE COLLEGE OF NEW JERSEY,

JUNE 23, 1872,

By *JAMES McCOSH, D.D., LL.D.*,

PRESIDENT OF THE COLLEGE.

PRINCETON:

STELLE & SMITH, PUBLISHERS AND BOOKSELLERS.

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PRINCETON, June 24th, 1872.

REV. DR. McCOSH:

DEAR SIR:—The undersigned committee, appointed by the Senior Class, at a meeting held June 24th, would respectfully and earnestly request, on behalf of the Class, for publication, your Baccalaureate Sermon, delivered June 23d, 1872.

C. S. LANE,
T. W. JOHNSTON, } *Committee.*
S. E. EWING.

PRINCETON, June 24th, 1872.

MY DEAR FRIENDS:—Since you have made such a request, I feel that there is no course left for me but to comply with it.

JAMES McCOSH.

S E R M O N .

“The just shall live by faith.”—*Rom.* ii., 17.

“But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine.”—*Tit.* ii., 1.

There is a well-known tale of a young woman coming to a Scotch minister to be admitted to the Lord's Table, of his examining her as to her knowledge of the truths of religion, of his finding her, as he thought, lamentably ignorant, and refusing her the privilege she was seeking; but, as she retired, she burst into tears, and the expression was wrung from her: “Though I cannot speak for my Saviour, I could die for Him”—an appeal which could not be resisted. I am, in this paper, to discourse, first, of the faith that saves; and secondly, the faith in truth which a man can utter and expound. The one of these is spontaneous, direct, looking immediately on Christ, living upon Him and by Him, and may be called Saving Faith; the other is reflective, looking to general truth, and may be called Doctrinal Faith.

I. “The just shall live by faith.” This faith is distinguished from sense and sight. “Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.” [John xx., 29.] Sense perceives the things immediately before it: as colors, shapes, sounds, and the round of occurrences in our world from day to day, and from year to year. Faith looks to things which are not seen. “Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” But faith is quite as natural an exercise of mind as sight

is. We all believe in things which we have not seen, and may never see, as in distant lands and remote events—of the existence of India and China—of old empires and geological epochs. There is an idea entertained by some that faith is a very mysterious thing—visionary, unreal, inexpressible, and inexplicable—as incomprehensible as some of the grand objects at which it looks; and they excuse themselves, in consequence, from seeking what they conceive to be so difficult to catch, or they content themselves with clasping a cloud, when they might have a substantial reality. Now there is no operation of mind more simple in itself, or which we are called on more frequently to exercise, than faith. The boy believes in the affection of his father, the pupil in the knowledge of his teacher, the youth in the trustworthiness of his bosom friend, the husbandman in the seasons, the patient in the medicines of his physician, the merchant in the connection between demand and supply, and the scholar in the value of research. Religion, in requiring us to exercise faith, is not demanding anything unreasonable or unnatural. Change the object to which it is directed: let it be a faith not in an earthly, but in our Heavenly Father; not in an erring human teacher, but a divine and infallible one; not in a friend who may fail in the time of need, but one “that sticketh closer than a brother;” not in a general, who may himself fall in the fight, but one who has gained the victory, and will make us conquerors and more than conquerors; not in the drugs which cure the body, but the blood of Christ which heals the soul; not in the revolution of the seasons, but the grander movement of God’s providence; not in the laws which regulate the acquisition and distribution of wealth, but in the connection of sin and suffering, of holiness and heaven; not in the value of human scholarship, but of divine learning—and it becomes the faith that saves and sanctifies. Columbus believed in a world beyond the then known world, sailed towards it, and reached it; the Christian believes in a world beyond the grave, and betakes himself to the ark which is to carry him to it.

But the question is started, What is faith psychologically—that is, as an exercise of the mind? Is it an act of the head or of the

heart? Of the understanding or the feelings? Of both? of one? or of which? To this questioning I reply first, that all these phrases need to be explained. So far as they are in popular use, they are vague, ambiguous; so far as they belong to mental science, no two metaphysicians explain them alike. We need not appeal to the inspired record to settle such questions scientifically, for Scripture is not a book of psychological any more than it is of astronomical or chemical science. It speaks of the stars, the elements of air and water, as they are noticed by common observation; and it speaks of the faculties of the mind in the same manner—not forming a new nomenclature, which it would be difficult to comprehend and arduous to study, but employing the phrases which it found in use at the time. Some represent the whole controversy as settled by Rom. x., 10: “For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness.” But the most cursory examination is sufficient to show that the word “heart” has a considerably different signification in the Old and New Testaments from what it has in literature and common conversation among us. We now denote by it simply the feelings: we understand by the head, we feel with the heart. But in the Hebrew and Hebrew-Greek use of the term, men are spoken of as understanding with the heart, as Mat. xiii., 15; the people’s heart is waxed gross, “lest they should understand with their heart.” One without heart is one without understanding; “Ephraim is like a silly dove without heart.” [Hos. vii., 11. See also Job, xxxviii., 36; Prov. x., 8; Is. vi., 9, &c.] Imaginations come from the heart: “Every imagination of man’s heart is only evil.” [Gen. vi., 2.] In Holy writ, the word evidently stands for inward thought and feeling of every kind, and includes all the various kinds of reflection, purposing, and sentiment which pass in the mind prior to action. When the shepherds visited Mary after the birth of the babe, “she kept all these things and pondered them in her heart.” [Luke ii., 19.] When Jesus, at the age of twelve, lingered in ~~the~~ Jerusalem, and drew forth the wonder of the people as he conversed with the doctors, “Mary kept all these things in her heart.” [Luke ii., 52.]

“With the heart man believeth ;” but with the heart, in the Scripture use of the word—that is, with the inward man, not of the mere feelings which are called bowels in Scripture, but of both the head and heart in the modern use of the terms. You may have observed that while the phrases “believe” and “faith” occur so frequently in the New Testament, they are more rarely found in the Old Testament. But we have the authority of the Apostle Paul [Rom. iv.] for saying that the plan of salvation is the same in the two dispensations ; that men were saved under the Old Testament as they are under the New—by faith. The phrase more frequently in the Old Testament is “trust,” less frequently “confide.” Every reader of Scripture must have noticed the frequent expressions of trust in the Psalms and the prophets, and the commands to trust in Him : “The Lord is good ; blessed is the man that trusteth in Him.” [Ps. xxxiv., 8.] “God is my salvation : I will trust and not be afraid.” [Is. xii., 2.] Combining and comparing such passages, we see that faith implies an exercise of the higher affections of the soul. If we draw, as I believe we may, and ought, the distinctions of modern mental science, and apply them to Scripture, then we have to say that understanding, will, and feeling are all implied in faith. There must be understanding ; for how can we believe in a thing of which we have no notion ? This is implied in Rom. x., 14 : “How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard ?” v., 17—“Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.” But the faith that saves is more than a mere intellectual judgment : it is trust—it is confidence ; and this comprises an exercise of will ; it involves the power of choice. We attach ourselves to Him, we accept of Him, we cast ourselves on Him, we rest upon Him. According to this view, faith consists of an assent of the understanding with the consent of the will, and these two raising feeling according to the nature of the truths apprehended and believed in.

Some, in these days, are forever telling us that religion is an affair of the heart, and not the head. They show us that a speculative assertion of dogma without love is cold, unattractive, offen-

sive. They remind us that the sacrifice could not rise to Heaven without a fire to kindle it. All true, I allow; but it is equally true that mere emotion without an object intelligently apprehended will turn out to be void, empty, evanescent, and ready to evaporate. If there be no acceptable offering till it is kindled, it is equally clear that the fire and the wood will be meaningless without a lamb for a burnt offering. [Gen. xxii., 7.] Why insist on separating what the Lord hath joined together—like male and female in marriage—first in the constitution of our minds and then in the affection of his people—the union of the firm with the flexible? I should certainly deplore to find any one resting contented with a faith without feeling; but it is equally vain to try to rise to a stablished assurance without first gaining the conviction of the understanding.

Religious faith is specially faith in God, as revealed to us. God hath so far made himself known to us in nature. It is, therefore, a faith in God as seen in His works, fashioned so skillfully, in His providence ordered so wisely. But then God has been pleased to make a particular revelation of himself in His Word to man as a fallen and erring being. Religious faith, then, is specially a belief in the testimony which God hath given of himself in the Scriptures. But God hath there manifested himself to us in the face of His Son. "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son who is in His bosom he hath revealed him." The faith that saves is a faith in Christ the Saviour. "What is faith?" asked a minister of a poor woman, a member of his congregation. "Faith," she answered, "is just taking God at His Word." God says, "I have so loved sinners as to give my Son to die for them." Faith responds, "Lord, I believe it." God says, "Here is the gift of my Son." Faith replies, "I take thee at thy word; I close in with and accept thy gracious offer." The faith which appropriates Christ brings us into a covenant relation with God, and we enter upon possession of the blessings which have been purchased.

We can discover, so I think, an appropriateness in faith being made the instrument of saving the sinner. We see that some

other proposed means are inapplicable and impracticable. Some would have the sinner's restoration to favor depend on his repentance and on the obedience rendered, as if genuine repentance did not require that the sinner should first be reconciled—as if obedience rendered by a sinner, unreconciled, would be accepted by God. Or, some one may say, let the sinner first love God, and then he will be pardoned. But the difficulty is to kindle love in a heart alienated from God. In order to obedience, in order to love, there must first be a turning to God; there must be a resting on him: and what is this but faith? In faith we submit to him; we bow ourselves before him; he is pacified towards us; and the stream of affection which had been restrained is ready to flow forth, we are ready to receive what he is ready to give, and it becomes in us “a well of water springing up unto everlasting life.”

When the sinner is justified by faith we are not to understand that faith justifies as being a work. This would be falling back on the legal system of justification, by works or merit. We hear persons asking, in doubt or in scorn, “Oh, how should there be so great merit in faith to save the sinner?” But we have only to reflect for a moment to discover that there is no merit in faith to save the sinner. One reason why faith is chosen as the means of saving us that it has and can have no merit. “Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay; but by the law of faith.” [Rom. iii., 27.] “Not of works, lest any man should boast.” [Eph. ii., 9.] Faith is, in its very nature, lowly and dependent; it looks to another, it leans upon another. It is the mere mean or channel through which the blessings which Christ purchased flow into the soul in rich profusion. Now it is required of a medium or channel that it be clear of obstruction: that there be nothing in it to stop that which is meant to pass through it. Herein lies the great efficacy of faith: it receives that which is given it, and through it the virtue that is in Christ flows into the soul and enriches and satisfies it.

What a power even in our earthly faiths, as when men sow in

the assurance that they shall reap after a long season, and labor in the confidence of a reward at a far distance! What an efficacy in the trust which the child reposes in the parent, which the scholar places in his master, which the soldier puts in his general, which the lover commits to the person beloved! These are among the chief potencies which have been moving mankind to good, or alas! to evil. As it walks steadfastly on, it discovers an outlet where, to sense, the way seemed shut in and closed. Difficulties give way as it advances, and impossibilities to prudence become accomplishments before the energy of faith.

To it we owe the greatest achievements which mankind have effected in art, in travel, in conquest: setting out in search of the unseen, they have made it seen and palpable. It was thus that Columbus persevered till the long-looked-for country burst upon his view—it is always thus that men discover new lands and new worlds outside those previously known. It takes us, as it were, to a mountain top, and widens the horizon of our vision.

But how much more potent is faith in God. It carries, and this according to the measure of it, the power of God. It is the attracting power that keeps the soul circulating round the Fountain of Light, as the earth does round the sun and is illuminated by it. It is no doubt weak, in that it leans; but it is strong, in that it leans on the arm of the Omnipotent. It is a creature impotency which lays hold of the Creator's power. It can do more than remove mountains; it can bid away the load of sin lying on the conscience and the heart. "We are justified by faith," says Paul. [Rom. vi.] "It purifies the heart," says Peter. [Acts xv., 9.] It "worketh by love," says Paul in another epistle. [Gal. v., 6.] It "overcometh the world," says John. [1 Ep. v., 4.] It is rich, for it serves itself heir to the blessings purchased at a great price, and left as an inheritance. There are times when, if we had nothing but sense and appearance, we should feel as if we were sinking in a dark and bottomless abyss; but by faith we plant our feet on the Rock of Ages, and are stayed and stablished. When the powerful king of

Syria came upon Elisha shut up in the small and defenceless town of Dolham, the prophet continued calm and unmoved, because he knew that "they that be with us are more than be with them." But his servant, when he looked on the horses, the chariots and the great host, was in great alarm, and, at the request of his master, the Lord opened his eyes, and he saw what the prophet had seen all along—"the mountain full of chariots, and horses of fire round about Elisha." So if we had but faith we would see that the host of the Lord "encampeth about them that fear him, and delivereth them." Faith shows us the land that is afar off as if it were near us, as in certain states of our atmosphere the distant mountains look as if they were in our immediate neighborhood. As we walk by faith, our eye is lifted from the earth and directed onward and upward, and we travel with the earth beneath our feet and Heaven in our eye.

II. "But speak thou the things that become sound doctrine." This is a farther duty. We are first to believe, but we are also to be ready to speak what we believe, and put it in the form of sound doctrine.

There is a difference between having a good reason for our faith and giving a good reason for our faith. Every student of logic has heard the story of the Chief Justice of England, who, on appointing one who had not had the advantage of a legal training to a judicial office, gave him the sagacious counsel: "When you pronounce a decision, do not add the reasons. Your decision from your good sense will invariably be right; your reasons will often be wrong." Because a plain, sincere Christian cannot expound his reasons for believing in the Bible as the Word of God, we are not to conclude that he has no reasons. A very correct process of thought, prompted by a good and honest heart, may have passed through his mind; but it might require a logician to unfold it. Still it is useful when a man has not only good reasons for himself, but is prepared to obey the command, "Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason for the hope that is in you with meekness

and fear." His own faith is strengthened by his being able to fall back upon the evidences when he is tempted to doubt; and he has many opportunities of convincing, influencing, and guiding others.

He is to "speak the things that become sound doctrine." Doctrine or dogma, like science, is arranged or systematized truth. The truth is revealed by God, but the form and expression of it may be made by man. The truth revealed in the Word is unerring, having the sanction of the God of truth. The arrangement by man may be more or less perfect, more or less imperfect. The truth as revealed consists of histories, biographies, symbols, types, precepts, promises, warnings, categorical statements as to the character of God and of man, scattered over sixty-six books, composed by perhaps as many different writers, some of these having written a number of works, such as Moses, Paul, and John, but some of the books, such as Psalms and Proverbs, being the composition of a number of persons separated from each other by ages. To know these truths, as they have been conveyed to us by the inspired writers, is all we need to know in order to salvation. I believe there are many now in Heaven whose knowledge, when they were on earth, of the truths revealed in Scripture was extremely limited. The question has often been put, How little may a man believe and yet be saved? The question is a curious rather than a profitable one. It can be definitely settled only by Him who "knoweth our frame" and can make allowance for circumstances. Every one who is saved must, I should judge, believe in God the Saviour, and have closed in with the gospel offer; but more, they will be ready to believe in all that is revealed, so far as they are able to become acquainted with it. They must never urge the circumstance that their knowledge is so limited as an excuse for their not taking steps to know more. It will be the earnest desire of every genuine believer to become versant with all that God has been pleased to make known in the volume of the book.

While God, by employing men of diversified gifts, has made His Word sufficiently varied to suit the tastes of mankind, so

far as they are healthy, he has not so enlarged it in bulk as to place it beyond the power of an intelligent reader to master its general contents. Not a few Christians have had the laudable desire to make themselves acquainted with the whole Scriptures of the Old and New Testament. And as man is a rational being, he will be impelled to employ his mind about what has been written. "I speak as to wise men: judge ye what I say." As, possessing the capacity of feeling, he would give them a place in his heart, so as endowed with intelligence, he would wish to allot them a place in his head, and incorporate them into his thoughts. As the original Scriptures were written in a language which is no longer spoken, so it is needful, in order to our understanding or even reading them, to translate them, or have them translated, for us. Then, there are many words and idioms in the Hebrew of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament which have nothing corresponding to them in English, and in order to bring them within our tongue and our comprehension, we must exercise judgment upon them, and choose the fittest phrase to express them. And among not a few there will be a strong desire to co-ordinate and bring under proper heads what is dispersed—like stars over the sky—in the inspired writings. As there are men of intelligence who have a desire not only to know individual plants, but to have plants classified, not only to know the separate stars in the sky, but to group the heavenly bodies into constellations, and to determine the laws which join planet to sun and star to star, so there are men who would tabulate the events of sacred history, to formalize the several precepts, and combine the scattered propositions in the form of sound words.

Then, there are circumstances ever casting up in the history of the church, which require us to put truth in a definite shape, not only for the benefit of the individual, but of the church at large. As we might expect from the tendency of mankind to err, and as the inspired writers themselves have predicted, there spring up persons who misunderstand the Word, and give a wrong interpretation; men unstable as water—unlearned and

unstable, who wrest the writings of Paul, and the other Scriptures, to their own destruction. There must be some way, not it may be of excluding these men from the communion of the church, but of becoming the teachers of others, to confuse and mislead them. But then it is said you may use the Scriptures themselves for this purpose. And it is true that the appeal must always be, at the commencement and the close, to the Word of God. But the subject of dispute here is as to the meaning of Scripture. They profess to be willing to accept what the Bible teaches, but they give an utterly perverse interpretation of it. Thus, in the fourth century, there arose a body of men who denied that Jesus was truly God, equal with the Father, and tortured the words of Scripture to defend their heretical opinions. There required, therefore, to be some means of ascertaining the sense in which persons understood the Scriptures—some test to try whether they regarded Christ as truly God; so the theologians of the age devised a nomenclature by which to exclude those who deemed the divinity of our Lord, who were required to say that he was of one substance with the Father. Hence the necessity and the use of creeds and confessions.

Doctrinal propositions, either when couched in Scripture language or drawn directly from Scripture, serve several important ends. It is true that faith in them is never to be substituted for faith in the living God and the living Saviour. Few things in this world are more offensive than head knowledge without corresponding practice; than an uncharitable, scowling orthodoxy, with no humble and loving faith in the loving Saviour. This is, in fact, the very essence of Pharisaism, which has been felt to be so repulsive in all ages. Its sternness is apt to dignify itself with the name of high principle; but if it be without affection, it is without the essential principle of Christianity, which is love, being the highest perfection in the character of Him who is expressively called Love. But if faith in doctrine is conjoined with faith in Christ, it accomplishes some very high purposes. First, it makes our ideas clearer, and keeps our thoughts, meditations, and expressions consistent. It is of special value to

teachers, as it enables them to expound the truth more clearly and consecutively to their hearers, who can take it up more readily and profitably, and call it back into the memory more readily and frequently. It is not necessary that they should always trouble their audience with the ratiocination which has satisfied themselves. John Foster remarks of the great preacher, Robert Hall, that he gave his hearers the results of profound thinking without the processes that led to it. I am of opinion that the perspicuous and brief exposition of the grounds or principles of a great truth might be profitable in a sermon addressed to an intelligent audience—quite as much so as a sensational appeal to the imagination or the feelings. But whether he chooses to speak of it to his people or not, there should always be a regulating principle of sound doctrine in his own mind, guiding and guarding the preacher. This will keep him from mistakes into which he might otherwise fall, on the one side or the other, while it would give him a fearlessness in proclaiming the full and many-sided truth—say the freedom of the gospel offer on the one hand, and the sovereignty of God on the other. But sound doctrine may be profitable not only to the teacher, but to the private Christian. Even the good woman that I referred to in the opening of this discourse might have been all the better, had she been able to speak about Christ, as she was ready to die for Him. A clear apprehension of divine truth will save a private Christian from many inconsistencies, into which he might otherwise fall without being aware of it—say from imprudences and sins into which impulse might hurry him, and which might greatly hinder his progress in the divine life, and bring disgrace on the cause of Christ. A man may be a very good mechanic without knowing natural philosophy; a very good gardener without knowing botany; but they will be the greater proficient in their art provided they know the scientific principles on which it is founded. So a man may be a good Christian, though he has not studied theology; but he will be a higher style of Christian, and will carry more weight, when he is able to condense his vague knowledge into a brief and comprehensive form of sound words.

These are doctrinal statements, so I hold, in the Word of God. True, the early Scriptures do not contain many general or abstract propositions. They do not commence as our catechisms and church articles do, with enunciations as to the being and character of God, as to the nature and destiny of man. The God who made us knows how to suit His instructions to us, and begins as the mind of man does in its natural progress—as you see the child does—with the singular and the concrete, with incidents, with biographies, with operations of God and deeds of man—with the creation, the fall, the promise of the seed of the woman, with the sacrifices of Cain and Abel, the flood, the dispersion of mankind, the call of Abraham, the going down into Egypt, the preservation of the family by means of Joseph, the exodus under Moses. But from an early date, and as mankind were prepared to abstract and generalize, there come up general expressions, which read as if they were the articles of a confession. The doctrine still comes in under the form of a particular proposition. “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” [Gen. i., 1.] “God created man in his own image; in the image of God created he him.” [i., 27.] “Every imagination of the thoughts of man’s heart was only evil continually.” [vi., 5.] “Abraham believed in the Lord, and he counted it to him for righteousness.” [xv., 6.] “The Lord passed by before Moses and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long suffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty.” [Exod. xxxiv., 6.] “Hear, oh Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord.” [Deut. vi., 4.] The declarations of this kind become more numerous as men’s minds are enlarged, and they are able to understand them. The psalms are full of lofty, spiritual thoughts and moral maxims expressed in lively poetical form, fitted to strike the fancy, and likely to stick in the memory. Out of the prophets you could draw a full creed, theological and ethical. Our Lord opens the New Testament dispensation even as Moses introduced the Old, by illustrations and examples. He

thus encourages little children to draw nigh to Him, while other teachers would drive them away. "The common people ever heard him gladly, and rejoiced in his instruction, because he taught them not subtleties like the scribes, but by self-evidencing statements, which shine in their own light." Still, you find coming out in our Lord's teaching, a number of grand truths, wide and all-embracing as the canopy of heaven—which ever widens as we seem to approach its boundaries. "I and my father are one." [John x., 30.] "Except ye be born again ye cannot see the kingdom of heaven." [John iii., 3.] "Except ye repent ye shall all perish." [Luke xiii., 3.] "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." [John xi., 25.] When He left the earth, our Lord gave a promise to his disciples that the Spirit would guide them into all truth, and the Epistles of the Apostles, which contain the latest revelation of the mind of God, are full of doctrinal statements. In the Epistles of Paul and Peter, specially in the Epistle to the Romans, we have a complete exposition and defence of Christian doctrine, and from these any one could draw a complete creed, expressed in Scripture language.

I admit that there must be stringent limits imposed on the formation of doctrines, and the imposition of creeds on individuals and on churches. First, we must see that they are drawn directly and easily from the Word of God. The generalizations we make must be of the statements of Scripture, and not of the dicta of our reason, not even of our experience as Christians. The great German theologian, Schleiermacher, made Christian divinity an expression and embodiment of Christian consciousness. But this is to reverse the proper order of things—to put that which is first, last, and that which is last, first; it is to make our experience determine the doctrine, instead of making the infallible truth of the Word determine and guide our experience. It is not the shadow on the dial which regulates the time, for the dial may be displaced and become mistimed; but it is the sun in the Heavens that should regulate both the dial and the time which the dial simply indicates. Secondly, no more

human speculation, however plausible it may seem to those who favor it, must be allowed a place in what professes to be Bible doctrine. Philosophers are at liberty to speculate as they please on the numerous topics brought before us in the Divine Word. But the conclusions which they reach are to be regarded as lying in the region of philosophical speculation, and not of scriptural truth. The history of philosophy and of metaphysical theology shows how sure men are to wander when they pass beyond the things revealed, and venture into the region of the secret things which belong to the Lord our God. A celebrated reformer used to represent angels as amusing themselves with the folly of the discussions in which theologians engage, often with such dogmatism and bitterness. The rash assertions which divines have made when they drew an astronomy or a geology out of the visual description of phenomena in the Word, are full of instruction and rebuke to those who would rear theories out of Scripture by human logic. No one should boast that he has been able to rise to a full comprehension of all the truths which God has been pleased, so far, to reveal to us. And so when we profess to expound Christian doctrine, we must be careful to avoid all wire-drawn distinctions—all mere dialectic processes involving abstruse notions and complicated trains of reasoning. In very many of the awfully profound subjects discussed in theology, we may fall into fatal error on one side or other when we begin to argue from Scripture, instead of simply accepting it. What is called inferential theology—that is, theology made up of inferences from Scripture—should be confined within very stringent limits. Certainly, we have no right to impose conclusions of our own on men who may be willing to accept Scripture on the fair interpretation of it. In the construction of creeds of every kind, advantage must be taken of the generalized statements of the inspired writers, specially of the Epistles of the Apostles. We should also look to the confessions which have been drawn out in various ages of the church to express the faith of God's people, and guard against heresy; in the Apostles' creed—which is an old one, though it does not go back to the time of the Apostles;

in the Nicene creed; in the Lutheran and Calvinistic confessions; in the Heidelberg Catechism; the Westminster Confession of Faith, and Shorter Catechism; and the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England—not that any Christian is bound to accept these because they have been constructed by great and good men or adopted by churches. Every one is entitled—nay, bound—to judge for himself, *de novo*, and as if no one had examined it before, all that is offered to his belief. But when he has done so, and then consults the confessions that have been drawn out by various churches in various ages, he will find that there is a wonderful *consensus* as to all important doctrines, and that the faith of all times has been virtually the same; and as he notices this, his views will thereby be rendered clearer and his assurance confirmed and strengthened.

But it is recommended to us to make our creed as wide and as loose as possible, lest we exclude any of God's chosen ones from the fellowship of the church. They warn us that by imposing too much we may lay a burden on the conscience which it is not able to bear, which may, in fact, crush weak believers and stir up others to rebellion. There is some wisdom, but more folly, in this counsel. Yielding to the judgment of charity, we are not to exclude a man from the communion of saints because his creed seems to us to be scanty. Nor are we to require of teachers in the church a profession of faith in logical distinctions or speculative theories, or indeed in anything beyond what is written in the Word, and so written that "he who runs may read." But, on the other hand, we must employ wise and firm means to secure that they who are officially set apart to teach others, "continue in the Apostles' doctrine," [Acts ii., 2,] and hold fast the form of sound words which they have heard of Paul and the other Apostles. [2 Tim. i., 13.] We are warned against being "children tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the sleight of men and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive." [Eph. iv., 14.] Such men, with or without knowing it, lead others into confusion, inconsistencies, and even heresy; they are blind leaders of the blind, whereby

both fall into the ditch. As to creed, a church is not acting wisely, is not acting faithfully, when it utters an uncertain sound. And as to direct, spontaneous faith, it is wrong to recommend any one to believe as little as possible. All are ready to believe what God has been pleased to reveal. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." [2 Tim. iii., 16.] Every truth there revealed has no doubt a purpose to serve: to increase our knowledge, to strengthen our faith, to enlarge our love, to warm our feelings; to warn, to rebuke, to encourage, to comfort; and so far as any one refuses to accept any inspired declaration, he may be losing the benefit which it is fitted to convey. Scientific experiment shows that if any of the constituents of the sunbeam be obstructed by artificial means, the plant on which it shines will be apt to take an unnatural, a sickly hue; and when men are indisposed to receive any of those truths given by inspiration, and which are profitable each for a purpose, it will turn out that their piety is so far unhealthy, misformed, and they are "not perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

But then it is urged that many excellent—nay, devoted—Christians have had a very limited apprehension of doctrine—nay, have held erroneous tenets. They show us that there was genuine faith in the middle ages, when images were used in worship, when priests claimed the power of forgiving sin, and when it was the general belief that persons could be justified by ritual observances. They prove that there would be genuine love to God in the breasts of members of the Romish Church, notwithstanding its corruptions. They remind us that, in these latter ages, there have been men—and they point to Chevalier Bunsen—who, with a very defective creed, have had a fervent affection for the Saviour. They are always quietly insinuating or boldly telling us that there is no connection between soundness in the faith and genuine piety. "Let the heart," they say, "be right, and it is of little moment in what state the head may be." "Men are to

be judged not by what they believe, but by what they do." "Faith, not doctrine, is the principal thing," say some. "Action, not faith, is the principal thing," say others, or perhaps the same persons, without perceiving their inconsistency. Now, there is an immense conglomeration of confusion first, and, by implication, of misleading error, in these representations, or rather misrepresentations. A sinner, I acknowledge, may be saved by faith, with very little knowledge; but this does not show that he can have faith without any knowledge; it does not prove that he should not be a better Christian were he to add to his faith, knowledge; and it does not tend to indicate that those who have true faith will not always be prompted to seek higher knowledge. The disciples, when they first believed, and even after our Lord had been employed for three years in training them, had a very limited knowledge; but for this he rebuked them—"O, fools and slow of heart to believe"—and they were ready to receive instruction, which he was ever imparting to them; and when he went up to Heaven, he promised the Spirit to guide them unto all truth. "When Jesus told Peter that he must suffer many things, and be killed, the Apostle took him and began to rebuke him." [Mat. xiii., 22.] Yet this same Apostle lived to write: "For Christ also hath once suffered for us, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." [1 Pet. iii., 18.] Many medieval Christians had very imperfect—indeed, erroneous—views on many important points—but this did not help—it rather hindered their piety, giving it a perverted twist or a sickly, mystic hue. And we who live in the full midday of the light should not seek to go back to the twilight of the middle ages. I admit that not a few have had a genuine faith with a very scanty, or even erroneous formalized creed; that some ready to die for Christ have been able to speak for Him only in a very confused manner, not unmixed with heresy. But then I could show that their defective belief has somewhat distorted their piety, giving it, it may be, a monkish appearance, as if it had been reared in a cloister, rather than in the fresh, open air of Heaven; this on the one hand or the other hand, stiffening their character into

rationalism—as in the case of John Locke—and leading them to overlook or set aside truths which might have imparted a fervor to their feelings or an impulse to their active benevolence; or what is as frequent, tempting them to neglect certain commonplace duties in attending to others more showy or sensational. And then, some of those who have expressed their faith very imperfectly, have had a very full and enlarged spontaneous faith in their God and Saviour—thus I have been able to testify of Bunsen, that during the five days I spent with him, we never conversed “for ten minutes at a time without his returning, however far he might be off, to his Bible and his Saviour as the objects that were evidently the dearest to him.”*

A living historian of great literary ability, in addressing an old Scottish university, has shown, by a large induction of facts, how extensive and intensive has been the influences in various ages and countries of a belief in such doctrines as the unbending righteousness of God and the predestination of all things. The portrait which he has drawn of Calvinism is not a true picture, but a caricature—an undue prominence being given to certain features and others sunk out of view. But Mr. Froude has had a glimpse of the intimate connection between a belief in such grand truths, and great and heroic character. “These were men possessed of all the qualities which gave nobility and grandeur to human nature—men whose life was as upright as their intellect was commanding, and their public aims untainted with selfishness; unalterably just where duty required them to be stern, but with the tenderness of a woman in their hearts; frank, true, cheerful, humorous, as unlike sour as it is possible to imagine any one, and able in some way to sound the key-note to which every brave and faithful heart in Europe instinctively vibrated.† The faith of some of these men may have been joined with error, not so much in their hearts or convictions as in the partial, one-sided expressions which they employed in setting forth and defending their dogmas logically, to face opposition. But it was

* See Life, by his widow. † “Calvinism,” by James Anthony Froude.

not the associated error, but the essential truth, which made these men true, courageous, and steadfast. There were misapprehensions in the view which Columbus took of the country he discovered—he thought it was part of the East Indies—but he had risen to the comprehension of the grand truth that the earth was round, and that there was land to be reached by sailing east from Europe; and, in this faith, he sought out and found the New World. So there may have been imperfections in the creed of these heroic men; but there was a direct faith, which not only saved their souls from inward and outward corruption, but imparted to them indomitable energy. And it is only so far as men hold by the same heart of truth that they can rise to the same elevation of character and devotedness of life. Mr. Froude does not seem to see this. There is no evidence that Mr. Froude himself believes in the truth which has made these men so true and so valiant in the past. He talks vaguely, as the whole school of Thomas Carlyle do, of men being lovers of truth, and brave, as if men could be lovers of truth who left themselves no truth to believe in, or could be expected to be brave when they have no great cause to fight for. As it was in ages past, so is it now, so it must be in ages to come, it is faith in eternal rectitude and unmerited love that stirs up to deeds of benevolence and self-sacrifice. “In the better sort of men,” says Mr. Froude, “there are two elementary convictions: that there is over all things an unsleeping, inflexible, all-ordering, just power; and that this power governs the world by laws which can be seen in their effects, and on the obedience to which, and on nothing else, human welfare depends.” There is all this, but there is vastly more than this needed; otherwise there will only be a dead faith in an abstraction, or a loose, pantheistic dream, which loosens the obligations of duty, and ends in mere intentions, without resolute action. It must be a faith not in a dead power, but a living God, holy and benevolent; and not in mere law, but in a loving Saviour, who has provided an expiation for those who have broken law.

The conclusion of the whole matter is drawn by the Apostle:

“Take heed to thyself and then to thy doctrine.” [1 Tim.] This is the proper order: “Take heed to thyself” thy soul’s salvation. Without this, faith in dogma will be of no avail. Without this, indeed, there will always be some defect in our doctrinal belief—some exclusiveness, some harshness in it. Men who have felt the truth are always the best able to understand it; they understand it because they appreciate it. Knowledge of some kind is implied in faith, but it is equally certain that they only who believe can rise to the fullest knowledge. Divine truth is always comprehended by the heart—that is, by understanding faith and feeling there is truth for all, there is truth for each of the faculties of the mind, that thus the whole soul, and not a mere part, may be drawn to God and to good.

We see, from this, what is the style of preaching most fitted to promote the cause of Christ. It is preaching that speaks of Christ, and speaks to all. There is a kind of preaching which sprang up in New England an age or two ago, and has since traveled south and west, of which I am not sure. The minister is a well-educated, thinking man, and he reads and ponders most of the week, and he brings out his peculiar cogitations on the Lord’s day. All well, I say. The good householder must bring out of his treasure things new and old; his congregation will not thank him for throwing to them what has cost him nothing; but then he brings out his own thoughts, ingenious, it may be, but wire-drawn and abstruse, instead of God’s Word, to which they are pinned, but from which certainly they do not grow. They are admired excessively by a select number of men and women, who are loud in praise of the preacher, and offer him a constant incense of adulation; but as to your children who compose, or ought to compose, so large a portion of every congregation, as to your servants, male and female, and your day laborers, who have toiled all the week, they might have felt an interest in the truths of God’s Word; they might have felt an interest even in the grand old theological distinctions embodying the thoughts of the best men of all ages; but as to the peculiar notions or nostrums of this preacher, they do not understand and they can-

not relish them, and it is no great loss to them that they do not. Whenever such a style of preaching prevails, the common people will leave the churches that require an educated ministry, and I am not sure but that they ought to do so. It will be a black day for any church—blacker than that which it may have had to suffer in the days of the bitterest persecution—when it ceases to preach to those to whom the Great Preacher was specially sent; “To the poor, the gospel is preached.” I rather think that there are signs that our merchants, distracted all the week with anxious cares in their offices, wish, on the Sabbath Day, which they would have to be a day of rest, to be delivered from all further distractions, and to hear the truths of the gospel preached, with thoughtfulness, no doubt, but giving them the results rather than the processes, and in all simplicity and affection. Of this I am sure that your truly learned men, when they come out from their books, from their literary and scientific pursuits, to the house of God on the Sabbath, would like to hear such words as Jesus uttered from the ship and on the mountain. Old Horace felt it to be his delight to sing *pueris et virginibus*, and, depend upon it, that it is the best preaching, and the most popular in the end, which suits the father and his son, the brother and the sister, the mistress and her maid, the learned and the unlearned.

But while you do this, you should not leave the other undone. “Take heed to thyself,” but “take heed to thy doctrine.” We are to beware of falling under the somewhat prevalent feeling that it is of no moment what a man’s doctrinal belief is. Speculative belief has ever a tendency to undermine our spontaneous faith, and will do so sooner or later. Nothing tends so much to deaden affection as skepticism; it is like a piece of ice at his heart, freezing the genial current of feeling that may be circulating there; it is a cold atmosphere, in which the plant may live for a little while, but will soon expire. If men have reasoned themselves into the conviction that there is no God, they will soon cease to cherish any affection towards Him, except, it may be, some remains of a fear like that which men entertain towards ghosts after they have ceased to believe in them. “He that

cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him." Some, bred and trained in their youth in a warm region of faith, have retained for a time a considerable amount of fervor in spite of their unbelief; but it fades like a reflection when the source of light and heat has gone. When we gaze on the glow of the evening sky, we are inclined to expect, even as we would wish it to continue; but it fades into darkness as we gaze upon it. So it will be with the fervor of feeling in our hearts if there is not a body of light and truth behind to keep it up. It is essential to our stability to have clearly-defined truth to fall back upon, in times of doubt and perplexity—some anchor to hold us when we might be driven about by every wind of doctrine. Such a form of sound doctrine will not indeed create or excite feeling, but it will stay and stablish feeling, and keep it from vanishing like "the morning cloud and early dew which passeth away."

It is a duty which you owe to yourselves to stand fast in the faith. And this is a duty which you owe to Christ and to His church, to "keep that which is committed to thy trust"—to transmit it to the age following, and thus help to secure that it may go down to the latest posterity. Not only so: we must, as good soldiers of the Cross, be ready "earnestly to contend for the faith which was once delivered to the saints," and to do so by all proper weapons of argument, of learning, of prayer, of affectionate appeal.

These observations of a combining character may fitly bring to a close my four years' course of religious instruction in this College. On taking upon me the office which I now hold, I found that I was required to give religious instruction to the students, and on no subject had I such anxious thoughts as in regard to the method of performing this very important and yet delicate duty. I do not claim for the course I have followed that it is superior to that followed previously in this College, or to that followed in other Colleges. I have to give religious instruction, and religious instruction must mean Bible instruction. I saw at once that it could and should not mean the phi-

losophy of religion, or the criticism of religion, or the defence of religion. From my tastes and my prevalent studies, which, for sixteen years, had been mainly in mental science, I would have found it easy and pleasant to dwell on themes like these. But I had other opportunities of expounding philosophy on the weekdays, when it came in appropriately, and I felt that if I gave effective religious instruction, I must bring the young men here in close contact with the Bible, and induce them to read the inspired writings for themselves, so as to enable them to spend a profitable, and withal a pleasant Sabbath, and so that they could lie down with a clear conscience at night, feeling that there was no man guilty between what they had been doing and the duties which God requires of them. Hence, these select readings in Scripture, these lectures on the Lord's Day, these weekly recitations. I have carried those who have been here the full course in the first year over the Four Gospels and the Life of Christ; in the second year over the Book of Acts, with references to the Epistles, and the work of the Spirit; in the third year over Christian Doctrine, with the Epistles to the Romans; and in the fourth, over the Old Testament, its history, and its poetry, and the prefigurations of Christ. My course is thus a circle; the student entering any one year will have a separate subject expounded, and those attending the four years will have a full course of biblical instruction. I am now to say a few words to those who are about to leave.

Those of you who have pursued the full academic course have been four academic years with us. They have been four eventful years.

They have been eventful years in the history of the College. You entered this institution at the time when the country was settling down after the devastating war, and when the friends were ready to rally round it and support it. The number of students has slowly but steadily increased; the year before you came it was two hundred and sixty-four; this year it is three hundred and seventy-nine. Some eight or ten new branches have been added to our course, bringing it up fully to the wants of the times; and selections of studies within stringent limits

have been allowed in the two advanced Classes. Fellowships and prizes of considerable value have been instituted to encourage the students to master the various branches of learning here, and to pursue deeper studies for a time after they have got their degree. I am convinced that during your academic course there has been severer study than before, among the better half of our students; and by systematized examinations, we are seeking to raise up the standard of the other half. The number and the elegance of our College edifices has been largely and visibly increased by the liberality of our friends. Among other points of agreement, it is worthy of being mentioned that we have been delivered during your course from some of the old College customs that disgraced it. It will be recorded in the history of this College that one of the last acts done by this Class was to pass a set of resolutions against the employment of dishonest means of any kind at the College examinations—resolutions concurred in by all the students assembled at a public meeting for this purpose. This leads me to remark that our College will not be in a satisfactory state until, along with our orthodox religion, we have the moral tone of the College so elevated that lying and deceit of every kind are reprobated by the great body of the students. I adhere to all that Paul says about the importance of faith; but I concur as heartily with James when he says that “faith, if it hath not works, is dead being alive.” [James ii., 17.]

They have been eventful years in your own personal history. They are four years of human life—proverbially short and uncertain. Here you have had opportunities and facilities for improvement, in the lectures, the recitations, the library, the scientific apparatus, and the literary societies. You have gained solid and varied knowledge, more or less, which may be useful through life, to you and others. There has been eager study on the part of many, and they have acquired habits of application and perseverance to go with them through their whole future career. But the grand work is not ended when you have finished your collegiate course: it is, after all, only begun—in the case of some, well begun. From this Commencement season you have to

enter on a wider arena, with more numerous competitors. I exhort those who have gained honors carefully to guard their honors. The laurels placed on your brow this week will soon wither, and you will need to earn fresh ones. Some, behind you at this stage, may come to outstrip you in the race of life. Some this day may be feeling, "I have not done what I might have done here." Well, let your resolution be, from this day, to enter in a new spirit on the work before you. My definition of a fool is not one who has never made a failure, but one who cannot profit by his failures. In looking back on my past life, I can testify that my days of failure have been the times that most helped me on. I remember fresh as yesterday the close of a session in my collegiate days, when honors were being distributed to my companions one after another, but none came to me, who had been reared in a retired country district, with no scholastic advantages, and I formed the secret purpose, expressed not even to mother or sisters, in the strength of God I will vie with the best of them; and ere I finished my College course, the University of Edinburgh departed from its precedent and gave me an honorary degree of A. M., without requiring me to pass an examination. I say it for the encouragement of those who might feel discouraged, because they get no honors on this occasion, that you may resolve to seek higher and more enduring honors.

But let me tell you that you are going forth into a field where you will have more powerful temptations—before which many fall. From the instruction you have received here out of God's Word you know what is needful in order to your being able to stand. You know that you need gracious aid to prepare you for that place to which you all trust to go when your labor here is over. But you know what is equally important for you to know, that you need a higher strength than your own to guide you in the right path through the tangled scenes of this life. So then that you have first faith to hold by God for yourself; and secondly, that you have faith in doctrine, which may keep you firm, and enable you to instruct others. This is the last time you will meet as a Class for the public worship of God. I do trust

that some of you will meet here from time to time, to revive old recollections and strengthen old friendships. But probably after the solemnities of these few days are over, you will never all meet at any one time or place. But you may now at this very time and place enter into a covenant "ordered in all things and sure," which will insure your meeting again—no wanderer lost—if not on earth, yet in Heaven: "come and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten."

With this Class I have been brought into contact for the last four years at least twice each week; with the Junior Class, and with the majority of the Senior Class, three times every week. It would show that I have no heart if I did not feel a pang in parting with, and if I did not promise to feel an interest in you. I remain here so long as God sees fit to spare me for usefulness; you go away to widely differing scenes and spheres. The good wishes and the prayer of your Alma Mater will follow you. She will rejoice to hear of your prosperity. She will rejoice still more to hear of your being good and doing good. Some of you, if you exhibit the same good qualities you have done here, may rise to eminence. All of you may be useful members of society. She will shed a secret tear of shame—concealing it from every one—if she hears of any of you doing a dishonorable deed, or falling into vice. I feel at this moment as if I had lost many precious opportunities of doing good. I feel as if I had left much unsaid that I should have said, and I am tempted to say it now. But past neglect cannot now be atoned for, and I know I am not likely to deepen any impression for good by much speaking. So, in the name of our gracious Redeemer, I give you one other invitation to come to Christ, and "I commit you to Him who is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy."