

4485



h.74

A

# DISCOURSE

DELIVERED ON SABBATH EVENING,

JULY 19, 1846,

BEFORE

THE THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

OF

UNION COLLEGE.

---

By WILLIAM B. SPRAGUE, D.D.

OF ALBANY.

---

R

ALBANY :

PRINTED BY C. VAN BENTHUYSEN AND CO.

.....  
1846.



## DISCOURSE.

---

THERE is something fitting, and even beautiful, in the idea of a theological society, originated and cherished in the bosom of a great literary institution. It looks as if genius were lighting her fires at the altar of religion. It seems to say that it is the right of Christianity to reign in the halls of science, and that it is the privilege of science to walk in the light of Christianity. If I were entirely ignorant of the character of this venerable institution, and my first inquiry concerning it were to be answered by a statement of the fact that it has in it a large and well directed and efficient theological society, I should expect to hear next of the general prevalence of order and diligence and morality; for I should say that those who belong to such a society surely must be the friends of virtue; and those who do not, can

hardly be the abettors of vice, while they breathe that healthful moral atmosphere, which the existence of an association like this, would seem to indicate.

The immediate design of a theological society is to awaken and cherish the spirit of theological improvement. And this is a matter of great moment, not merely to those who have their eye upon the ministry as their future profession, but to all, irrespectively of what they are to be or to do in subsequent life. You may be a physician, or a lawyer, or a statesman, a teacher of youth, a man of letters, a gentleman of leisure—any thing you please, and if you are well versed in Theology, you will be the better for it. Such acquisitions will be much more than a graceful appendage to your literary character—they will supply you with materials of elevated and improving thought; they will open for you channels of usefulness, which otherwise would remain closed; and not only the community in which you live, but the generations that shall live after you, may be the wiser for your having opened your mind to the light of theological science.

It is of THEOLOGICAL SCIENCE—of its *sources*, its *characteristics*, its *uses*, that I propose now to speak; but you will instantly perceive that the subject introduces us into a field which we can but very imperfectly survey, during the brief hour in which I am permitted to claim your attention. If I can only suggest a few hints that may serve, even in the humblest measure, to strengthen your conviction of the value of theological truth, or to assist your efforts in the attainment of it, the utmost that I have ventured to hope for, will have been accomplished.

I am aware that there is a prejudice with some against regarding Theology as a system; and the very phrase has not unfrequently awakened suspicion of some design against the simplicity of the gospel. It must be admitted that divine truth is not revealed, for the most part, in systematic form; (though there are signal exceptions to this, particularly in some of Paul's epistles;) and we can see good reasons why it should be revealed in the manner that it is—reasons worthy of the benevolence and wisdom of the Highest; but who will undertake to say that, because it has not pleased

God that his revelations should come in the form of a system, therefore, there is really no principle of order pervading them? Wherefore should this constitute an exception from all the other departments of knowledge? In mathematics, in philosophy, in the various branches of natural science, you have your first principles; and then you have other truths growing out of these and ranging about them; and the farther your investigations proceed, the more of beauty and symmetry and system you discover. All Jehovah's works are perfect: the works of nature, the works of providence, the works of grace—all are characterized by perfect order and adaptation; and as it is the province of science in general to ascertain and arrange the great principles of the divine economy in respect both to the material and the immaterial, so it belongs to theological science in particular, to present in their legitimate order those great moral and spiritual truths, which, in one book or another, God has revealed for the benefit of his creatures.

What then, let us inquire, are the great SOURCES from which theological science gathers its materials?

There is one volume replete with theological truth, that has existed always—at least from the time that the morning stars sang, and the sons of God shouted. It was open to the parents of our race on the first morning of the creation. It has been open to all the dwellers on the earth ever since. It is open now to people of every kindred, of every clime, of every colour, of every condition. You cannot open your eyes but they rest upon some one or other of its pages. Look up to the heavens, and see how those bright orbs shine in un fading lustre, and revolve in perpetual harmony. Look abroad upon the earth, and mark the wonderful powers and processes that appear every where. Penetrate as far as you may beneath the surface of things, and you shall never reach a point where new wonders shall not be continually urging themselves upon you. Turn your eye inward, and it shall rest upon another world still—a world where greatness and meanness are struggling for the ascendancy; where reason and conscience and passion have their dwelling place and exercise their dominion. Now, believe me, if you have viewed these various objects as you ought, you



have been taking lessons in theological science—you have been in communion with the Fountain of all wisdom as He has revealed Himself in his works. For how came this wonderful fabric which you behold, in existence, if it were not created; and who could the creator be but God? Whence all the wisdom and goodness that are displayed here, if not from an infinite fountain of wisdom and goodness? What means that inward sense of right and wrong, unless it points to a retributive future? What means that dread of ceasing to exist, what those longings after immortality, what the susceptibility of indefinite improvement that belongs to those noble faculties, if God's voice be not in it all, speaking to us of a life that will never die?

But I hear you ask, is this all that God has written in this great book of universal nature? Is it so that the teachings of the heavens and the earth, the air and the ocean, the world without and the world within, are so limited as to be comprized almost within the utterances of a single moment? I answer, it is even so; and more than that—these lessons, limited as they are, were never fully read, except by

those who have been reached by some beams at least of the Sun of Righteousness. Socrates and Cicero and all the sages of Pagan antiquity, lived in the same great and beautiful world in which we live, and they were the objects of the same beneficent care, and they witnessed the operation of the same physical and moral laws; and yet they blundered in respect to the very first truths of religion. Here they were in degrading error, there they were in perplexing doubt, and never do we find them walking in the clear sun-light of well established conviction. We are obliged then to admit that, however clearly God has written these first truths on the works of his hands, man, with his diseased spiritual vision, never reads them correctly, until they are thrown into another and a brighter light. And then there are other truths of the highest interest to man, in respect to which nature teaches absolutely nothing. What if we should admit that reason unassisted could grope her way to the conclusion that man is to live hereafter and to live forever—it were a poor consolation to him to be able to prove his future being, unless he could also find some provision for his future *well* being;

and when reason has done her utmost, and has even invoked charity to her aid, she is obliged to leave him a sinner in the hands of divine justice. This vast frame work of the universe, this bright canopy that hangs over us, this mysterious spirit that breathes and glows within us—each has a meaning—a glorious meaning; but no part of that meaning is, that the guilty soul may be forgiven, and the polluted soul be renovated, and the body mouldered to dust and scattered to the winds, be reorganized and re-animated for immortality. And yet what is man, until these mighty questions have been answered for him ?

Here then we open another volume, in which all that was wanting in the former is supplied. In the book of nature God revealed Himself to man as his creature—in the book of revelation He reveals Himself to him, not merely as his creature, but as his fallen creature. What nature had taught obscurely, revelation teaches clearly; and then there is a new bright field of truth into which revelation introduces us, for which nature in her weakness and her ignorance had indeed longed, but which was hidden by a veil which she had no vision to

penetrate. This is nothing less than the mediatorial economy in all its height and length and breadth and depth;—that economy in which the glory of the Highest has its most perfect illustration. Oh what a mine of theological science is here! You are carried down into the very heart of the Godhead; you are carried up into the palace of the great King; you are carried onward through ages of fearful or glorious retribution; you are carried all over God's universe to witness the effect of the scenes of Calvary; and wherever you move, you move amidst a flood of divine glory. And remember that this revelation is of no questionable authority—it bears upon every page of it—"Thus saith the Lord." To establish its truth, God condescended to put back the chariot wheels of his providence; to bring almighty strength into conjunction with mortal weakness, thus forming a miraculous ministration; and not only so, but He has given to the revelation itself such a character that you must turn your eyes away from it, if you will not be constrained to acknowledge its divinity. Here, I repeat, here is the grand source of all theological knowledge. Study

Theology in the works of nature as much as you will, but remember that nature is not your oracle. Sit with docility to receive the teachings of the things that God has made, concerning the invisible things of his nature and government, but forget not that your greater homage is due to the more sure word of prophecy.

Passing now from the sources to the CHARACTERISTICS of theological science, let me ask you to notice, first, its *comprehensiveness*.

It comprehends the existence, the character, the works, of God.

Theology asserts that there is a supreme, intelligent First Cause of all things, whom we call God; that He exists under the three distinct relations of Father, Son and Holy Ghost; that every possible perfection originally and essentially belongs to Him. It teaches that He made all things visible and invisible by the word of his power; that He rules in all worlds and controls all events; that He governs moral agents according to the laws of their moral nature; that He will cause the wrath of man to praise Him and the remainder of wrath will restrain. It teaches that the

fall of man furnished the occasion for the triumph of his mercy; that with that event commenced the development of an eternal plan for the redemption of the world; that that plan includes the life and death and mediatorial reign of the Son of God; and that, when it shall have completely gone into effect, the end shall come, when Christ shall deliver up the kingdom to God even the Father.

It comprehends, further, the character, the duty, the destiny, of man.

What man's character is now, every one may know by an inspection of his own heart. It is a strange commingling of light and shade—of mighty powers for good with mighty propensities to evil. But Theology teaches that it has not always been thus with him; and more than that—it includes the history of the disastrous change. It teaches that, as he came from his Maker's hand, he was as pure and bright as an angel; that sin the spoiler came, and the divine image upon his soul became dim, and the pall of death fell upon all his hopes; that, in virtue of the mediatorial dispensation, spiritual life may come, does come, in place of spiritual death; but that

even regenerated man, so long as he remains here, moves under a mighty burden of sin. It sets forth man's duties—his duties to God—not only those which he owes to Him as a creature, but especially those which he owes to Him as a sinner; which have immediate reference to the mediation of Christ and the agency of the Holy Spirit; his duties to his fellow creatures—duties belonging to all his social relations—duties bearing upon every interest, and modified by an almost endless variety of circumstances. And while it prescribes the duties, it reveals the source of strength for the discharge of them—it reveals the principle of faith, by which human impotence may bring to its aid almighty power; by which human corruption may be transformed into perfect purity. And, moreover, it lifts the veil that nature has left resting upon man's destiny; it shows us immortality inscribed not only upon the spirit but upon the body; for though the body must die, it dies to live again. And finally, it proclaims an exact retribution—endless glory and honour to the righteous, endless shame and contempt to the reprobate.

Such is the most general outline of theologi-

cal truth ; but do you not perceive at once that it comprehends both eternity and immensity ? It includes a character that none by searching can ever find out ; a providence covering the universe both of matter and of mind ; reaching backward into the depths of the eternal past, forward into the depths of the eternal future. It comprehends all the relations, all the responsibilities, all the interests, of man, from the commencement through every period of his eternal existence. What other science is so comprehensive as this ? Whose mind does not labour and falter in the attempt to traverse this immeasurable field ?

Contemplate, next, the *spirituality* of this science : and I use the word spirituality in a double sense ; as opposed to that which is material, and to that which is unholy.

Far be it from me to speak lightly of any of God's handiwork, however minute, however apparently unimportant ; for there is not an insect that glitters, or a flower that blossoms, or a particle of dust that moves in the breeze, but bears upon it the signature of infinite power and wisdom ; and that signature it is the province of Theology herself to read. But



it is not with the material but the immaterial that Theology is more directly concerned: though she includes the whole universe of matter as well as of mind, as illustrative of a creating and providential energy, yet it is in the spiritual world that she finds her peculiar element: it is in the region of intellect and conscience, of thought and feeling, that she lives and moves and has her being. Is not mind more than matter? Shall the clods of the valley that think not, feel not, rise up and dispute the palm with that mysterious something within, that can travel off on the wings of the morning, into the invisible and far distant dominions of Jehovah? Is that which decays under the hand of time, or which must burn in the fires of the last day, to be compared with that which shall survive the passing away of the heavens and the earth, and shall exist in conscious activity while immortality endures? Need I ask whether that science which has to do with the intellectual and moral, the invisible and immortal, is not incomparably superior to any other science, which contemplates merely some one or more of the forms of material existence?

But Theology is spiritual also in the sense of being holy. It includes the character of God, and that is a perfectly holy character. It includes the law of God, and that is a perfectly holy law. It includes the providence of God, and that is a perfectly holy providence—yes, perfectly holy; for though, to the eye of short sighted man, some of God's ways may not appear equal, yet we have the assurance that "justice and judgment are the habitation of his throne." Holiness is inscribed on every feature of the plan of redemption—it was God's holiness that required the great atoning sacrifice; and the sacrifice itself was perfectly holy; and the ultimate design of the sacrifice was to bring man into a state of perfect holiness, while it should cause the holiness of God to be seen and felt and admired throughout the intelligent universe. Holiness will reign and shine on the judgment day, and throughout eternity; and not less amidst the wailings of the reprobate than the ecstasies of the glorified. Each particular doctrine and precept which Theology includes, as well as the entire system, breathes the spirit of holiness, and is adapted to the formation of a holy character. Is it not

then, in the highest sense, a spiritual system? If we compare it with other sciences, not excepting even those which contemplate the intellect of man, without including his moral capacities and relations, must we not acknowledge that it holds a glorious pre-eminence?

You will anticipate me when I say that *sublimity* is another attribute of theological truth.

Let the great truths which Theology includes pass successively before your mind, and say whether you do not find yourself moving through a field of moral grandeur, such as the universe does not elsewhere present. The weakness of your mind is such that you cannot take in the whole character of God at once—hold to your thoughts then his several attributes, one by one; and see whether, even then, your thoughts do not struggle beneath the burden. The omnipotence of God, shooting the gulf between non-existence and existence, and creating and upholding all worlds and all beings visible and invisible—the wisdom of God, framing a perfect system of adaptation, that reaches from the highest to the lowest of his creatures, and pervades the entire universe—the goodness of

God, dispensing blessings all over the creation, and establishing innumerable silent and mysterious agencies by which these blessings are conveyed—the justice of God, maintaining the rights of his throne, at the expense of the sufferings of hell on the one hand, and the sufferings of Calvary on the other—each of these and of all his other attributes introduces the mind into an illimitable field of sublime contemplation. And if we pass from the character of God to his government, what wonders upon wonders still cluster upon us! There is nothing so vast but that his hand moves and guides it; nothing so insignificant but that it has its end to accomplish; nothing so intricate and perplexed but that it is working out a clear and glorious result; nothing so desperately evil but that it will appear at last to have been the minister of good. And from God's universal and particular providence, we may enter yet another field, or rather another department of the same field—I mean the stupendous work of man's redemption. And that you may see the most at a single glance, take your station on Calvary, and after having surveyed the exterior of all that is passing there,

penetrate, as far as you can, into those depths of holiness and wisdom, of truth and love and glory, into which that scene introduces you: especially look up to Heaven, and see the millions of harps that are strung by an influence from the cross, and attuned to the praises of the cross; and see how much of the glory of that world has risen out of the darkness of that hour in which the powers of evil enjoyed their most malignant triumph. And finally look down into the future, till you reach the resurrection and judgment day—that day when the small and great shall stand before God, and the retributions of eternity, having been irreversibly fixed, shall be openly and authoritatively proclaimed. Who does not perceive that these are subjects, which, in point of sublimity, cast all others into the shade? It is here particularly that imagination, poetry, eloquence, delight to dwell; and here, beyond all question, they have performed, and ever must perform, their noblest work.

I have spoken of the sublimity of the truths that belong to theological science; but I must not omit to notice the sublimity that pertains to the revelation itself. It cannot be denied

that the human mind, without supernatural aid, has produced many works which have been greatly and justly admired for dignity and splendour both of conception and of expression; but I appeal to any competent and impartial judge, whether the Bible does not furnish strains of eloquence and poetry, in comparison with which the noblest efforts of uninspired genius seem tame and frigid. Milton was a bright star in one department; and Shakespeare in another; and Burke in another; and Robert Hall in another; but put any or all of them by the side of Moses, or Job, or David, or Isaiah, and their splendour instantly undergoes an eclipse. As Theology is concerned as well with the manner in which truth is revealed as with the truth itself, the sublimity of the former as well as of the latter is to come into our estimate of the character of the science; in other words, we are to notice not only what God hath spoken, but how He hath spoken, if we will detect all the marks of moral grandeur which He has left upon his revelation.

But theological science derives its sublimity, as well from that which is not revealed as from

that which is. Each of the revealed mysteries of the Bible opens into a field of unrevealed mystery, in which reason has nothing else to do than bow in silence before the deep things of God. If there is sublimity in the revealed fact that divinity and humanity are united in the person of Jesus Christ, there is sublimity also in the unrevealed manner in which this union is constituted. If there is sublimity in the revealed fact that God works in man's own moral agency, to accomplish his salvation, there is sublimity also in the unrevealed mode of this divine operation. If the revealed fact that there is to be a final resurrection both of the just and the unjust, be invested with a surpassing moral grandeur, can we say less of that process, overhung as it is with darkness, by means of which this mighty consummation is to be effected? And so it is with respect to all the other mysteries of our faith. We gradually climb the lofty height, walking in the light of revelation, till we find thick mists gathering around us, and dark clouds overshadowing us; but if there is sublimity in the glorious objects that are thus brought within the range of our vision, what say you of the

deep shadows by which our vision comes to be obstructed—what of the vast unknown upon which those shadows rest? Oh it were an easy matter to lose one's self any where amidst the sublimities of Theology; but methinks it were most easy to do this at that remotest point of observation, which borders upon that darkness which Jehovah makes his pavilion.

From the sublimity pass now to the *harmony* of theological science; and this is the last attribute with which I will detain you.

If we limit our views to those great truths which constitute what may be appropriately called the evangelical system—those truths I mean, which are peculiar to revelation, and which contemplate man in the character of a sinner, we shall find that in the relations which they bear to each other, they are severally, and as a whole, in perfect harmony. The time will not allow of any thing like an adequate illustration of this thought—I will therefore only ask you to notice the harmony that exists between certain different features of the Christian system, which, at first view, it may seem not so easy to reconcile.



Man, as a sinner, has violated the law of God—that law, the penalty of which is eternal death; and God’s justice is pledged for the execution of the penalty. Suppose now, by an act of mercy, the sinner is to be pardoned, must not the mercy that pardons conflict with the justice that condemns? It must, for aught that any finite being, anterior to God’s own revelation, can discover to the contrary. But in the cross of Christ, these and other corresponding attributes melt into each other in the sinner’s forgiveness, like the colours of the bow. The Son of God steps in, and by his propitiatory death, vindicates, magnifies the honours of the law, and opens a channel through which the streams of divine mercy may consistently flow to the world. “Mercy and truth meet together, righteousness and peace embrace each other.” •

It is one doctrine of the gospel that salvation comes by grace, through faith, irrespective of all personal merit; and it is another that men must be holy in all manner of conversation: but does not the doctrine of a free salvation furnish inducements to an unholy rather than a holy life? No; for the very faith that

accepts of salvation, supposes a renovated nature, the legitimate operation of which is obedience to the divine commandments. In the practical reception of this doctrine there is a principle of holiness implanted in the soul; the love of Christ constrains the true believer; and he glorifies God both in body and spirit, in consideration of the fact that he has been bought with a price. The Christian, so far from finding in the doctrine of the cross, the semblance of a motive to relax in the ways of well doing, gathers from it the most powerful considerations to lead him to forget the things that are behind and press forward. Indeed the cross is the great centre of attraction to his soul, not more as a fountain of forgiveness than as a fountain of holiness.

The gospel teaches man's obligation to come to Christ, while yet it declares that no one can come, except the Father draw him. And is it so that a just God can bind me to that which I have not the ability to perform? The answer is, the only inability under which man labours is an inability of the heart—an inability that results from his own depravity; and to suppose that such an inability lessens obli-

gation, were to admit the absurd idea that the more guilty a man becomes, the less he deserves to be punished. There is then no discrepancy between the teachings of the Bible in relation to man's obligation, and the teachings of the Bible in relation to man's impotence; for his impotence is the fruit of his depravity, and for his depravity surely he is responsible.

The gospel teaches that man, as a moral agent, works out his own salvation, and that God, as a sovereign and gracious agent, works within him to will and to do. How these two facts harmonize, we do not indeed pretend to know—*that* is among the things which God has still reserved in his own keeping; but that the two facts actually do harmonize we know, because we know that they coexist, and that they grow out of God's own perfect ordinance. I take counsel of my own spirit, and learn my own moral agency. Again, I turn my eye inward, and find that a work has been performed there too great for any but a divine power to accomplish. I open the Bible, and find both these facts united in the doctrine of man's conversion. Can I doubt then that these two facts are in perfect accordance with

each other; that there is a perfectly harmonious co-operation between finite and infinite in every case in which the sinner is turned from darkness unto light?

I have said that those doctrines which are peculiar to revelation harmonize with each other—not less do they harmonize with the doctrines of natural religion. For, as we have already seen, whatever natural religion teaches, revelation teaches also; and the doctrines which are peculiar to the latter, do not in any wise contradict those of the former, inasmuch as the two systems contemplate man in entirely different relations. Nay, more—the peculiar doctrines of Christianity actually furnish an additional illustration of the truths of natural religion. Even those attributes of the divine character, to the discovery of which it has been supposed that reason might attain, shine out with incomparably greater lustre, when viewed in connection with the scheme of man's redemption. The obligation of man to worship and obey his Creator—how immeasurably is this heightened by those new relations to his Creator which Christianity recognizes—to say nothing of the greater clearness by which

the revelation is attended. The doctrine of a future existence and a future retribution—how each of these rises out of deep shadows into noonday, when, instead of being viewed in connection with the feeble proofs which unassisted reason can bring to their support, they are brought into the glorious light of Christianity—are illustrated by the various parts of the mediation of the Son of God. So you perceive, it is not merely that there is greater authority and certainty attending these truths as they are found in revelation than as they are discovered by reason, but they assume a far more comprehensive and glorious form; they gather new dignity from their connection with other truths, which belong to another, and I may add a higher, department of the divine economy.

There is harmony, moreover, between the system of theological truth and the constitution and wants of man.

How admirably does this system adapt itself to man as a creature of intellect! Truth is the appropriate element of the mind; and it is in the contemplation of truth, in the study of truth, alone, that its faculties can attain to

their legitimate development. Every kind of truth has its value—historical truth—physical truth, mathematical truth, philosophical truth, each opens a wide field of thought, and in the contemplation of each the mind becomes brighter and stronger—capable continually of yet more vigorous efforts, and more enlarged acquisitions. But theological truth, as it carries the mind forth into a region of still greater glory, so it is fitted to give the sublimest exercise to its various faculties. Contemplate the scriptural view of the character and government of God, of the character and mediation of Christ, of the character and work of the Holy Spirit; contemplate the scriptural view of man in his ruin, and man in his recovery, and man in his final and everlasting triumph over the curse; and say whether this is not the broadest and the brightest field over which it is possible for the intellect to wander—say whether there is not wonderful harmony between the objects which are here presented, and the faculties which are employed upon them.

But not less is this system adapted to man as a creature of affections. What chord, I ask, has God strung in our moral nature, that

does not vibrate to some or other of the great truths of his word? Is man susceptible of admiration—what so much to be admired as the plan of the divine government; so vast as to comprehend immensity and eternity, so minute as to take cognizance of a sparrow's fall? Is man susceptible of reverence—but what so well adapted to awaken this sentiment, as the character of our Father in Heaven—the infinitely holy God? Is man susceptible of gratitude and love—but who shall awaken these affections, if not the Father who gave his Son, and the Son who gave Himself a sacrifice for our sins? Are hope and joy among the inmates of man's bosom—but what can he hope for so glorious as the eternal weight of glory? In whom shall he rejoice if not in God? In what shall he rejoice if not in God's providence and promises? And while these great truths are fitted to call into exercise the various affections of the soul, they are no less fitted to give them a right direction. Worldly affections, unsanctified affections, grovelling affections, are a source of perpetual bitterness and torment to man's spirit; but those affections which have been moulded and trained by the

influence of divine truth, become a fountain of substantial and endless blessing.

I must not omit to say in this connection, that the harmony that exists between Theology and the constitution of man, has special reference to his constitution as a depraved being—in other words, it contemplates him not merely as in possession of those original faculties which he has received from his Creator, but as having perverted those faculties, and thus incurred his Maker's displeasure. But sinner though he be, his natural longings for happiness have never been subdued or even checked; and it is the crowning excellence of revealed Theology, that she makes provision to meet these longings even in his present state: to the sense of guilt she opposes the proffer of forgiveness; to the propensity to evil, an all-powerful influence from on high; to the uncertainty that hangs over the eternal future, the most ample revelations concerning human destiny. No matter what the circumstances of man as a sinner or a sufferer may be—be it that his conscience has suddenly begun a ministration of wrath; or that calamity has sported with his best earth-



ly hopes; or that death is in the act of dislodging his spirit from its earthly tabernacle—in any or all these conditions, the system of divine truth is in perfect harmony with his wants: here and here alone is the antidote to the clamours of guilt—the balm for the wounded spirit. Philosophy is good in her place; and we would be far from undervaluing her teachings; but it is not her province to administer to man in his extremity; and if she ever ventures amidst such scenes, she is sure to show herself both a blind guide and a miserable comforter.

I only add, under this general branch of my discourse, that Theology is in harmony with the discoveries of science.

You all know how, in these latter years, infidelity has laboured to find an ally in science; how she has explored the heavens and the earth—I had almost said, ransacked the whole creation, with a view to put the God of the Bible in conflict with the God of nature, and thereby to discredit the testimony of the former. The two branches of science that she has invoked to this accursed alliance with the greatest pertinacity, are Geology and Astrono-

my. Of course the time does not permit us to sketch even an outline of the history of this crusade against revelation ; but the truth does permit us to state that science has disdained the ignoble partnership to which she has been solicited ; and instead of having any thing to say against revelation, she stands forth reverently and efficiently to justify its claims ; and the more mature she becomes, the more decisive is the testimony that she renders.

Infidel geologists have told us that the constitution of the globe is such, as to give the lie to the Mosaic history of the creation ; but it would have been well for their modesty, to speak of nothing else, if they had remembered that, before they can be justified in pronouncing such a sentence, they must at least be familiar with the ultimate facts of the science, so that their conclusion may be based upon their knowledge and not upon their ignorance. More than this—the researches of some of the greatest minds of the age have evinced, beyond a peradventure, that there is no discrepancy between the testimony of geology and the statements of revelation. Cuvier and Buckland and Hitchcock, and a

whole galaxy of illustrious minds, have lent their aid to show that it is the same voice that speaks from beneath the surface of the earth, and from within the lids of the Bible. Even if the time would permit me to present an outline of the christian argument on this subject, I should think it unnecessary; especially as I doubt not that you, in common with many beyond your immediate circle, have had the benefit of a condensed and beautiful argument from your venerable President;\* an argument fitted as well to seal the lips of the skeptic, as to inspire the heart of the Christian.

Infidel astronomers too have lent themselves to the same malignant work. They have pointed their telescope to the heavens, and counted thousands of worlds upon thousands of worlds, while yet they have been aware that they were scarcely beginning to penetrate the depths of immensity; and they have asked with an air of triumph—Who can believe that a Being whose empire is so vast, should bestow upon this insignificant world of ours such dis-

---

\* Dr. Nott's lectures on the relations of Geology to Revelation, have been listened to with great interest in different places, and it is much to be desired that the public should have the benefit of them through the press.

proportionate regard as is implied by the mediatorial work of the Son of God? Is it not a reflection upon his character to suppose that a creature of such limited capacities as man, who was born yesterday, and is to die to-morrow, should have concentrated upon him the divine compassion in such a manner, as the story of the scenes of Calvary would seem to indicate? We say to the infidel astronomer, No; or rather, we repeat the answer which science herself, baptized with the spirit of Christianity, has a thousand times given, accompanied with proofs that skepticism has never been able effectually to gainsay.

You perceive the infidel's argument is based on the insignificance of man, as viewed in contrast with the majesty and the boundlessness of Jehovah's empire. But the infidel cannot deny that man, insignificant as he would represent him, has actually drawn towards him, in a high degree, God's providential regards. If, in the works of nature and the general arrangements of providence, God has manifestly and greatly consulted the happiness of his creature, in reference to this brief hour of his existence, surely it is in no wise incredible that,

in the exercise of the same benevolence, He should have employed even the expensive means which the gospel contemplates, to secure to him the blessings of an endless life. But man is not the insignificant being which the infidel pretends: considered as a creature of immortality, with faculties susceptible of boundless improvement, he rises into a being of mighty importance; and who shall say that the majesty of his nature does not, to the eye of Him who fully comprehends it, justify that measure of divine regard which he actually receives? And then again, let it be remembered that it is not an individual but a race, for whom this wonderful provision has been made—a race whose numerical importance death is ever increasing, by making way for successive generations—a race which shall ultimately be composed of a multitude that no man can number, each individual of whom shall survive, with ever-growing capacities of improvement and action, of enjoyment or suffering—nay, shall have only begun to exist—at the remotest point in eternity upon which imagination can fasten.

But as the infidel's argument against the

redemption is founded upon the insignificance of man—the insignificance even of the race, in view especially of the discoveries of astronomy, we undertake to say that astronomy, instead of rendering the redemption improbable, surrounds it with incomparably greater glory. Who has told the infidel that the influence of this vast scheme is limited to the world which has been the immediate theatre of its development; or rather that it has not darted forth, like an all-pervading element, throughout Jehovah's illimitable dominion? Who has told him that, if these orbs above us that look so bright, are the habitation of spirits who are yet brighter and purer still, each of those spirits in each of those worlds, may not be continually growing in knowledge and strength and glory, by the contemplation of that very scheme by which man's redemption is achieved? Or if the case be supposed that some of them have broken their allegiance to God, and are standing forth, like our own world, in the attitude of revolt, where has the infidel learned that there may not be a recovering virtue in the cross that reaches even to *them*, and that shall bring

them ere long into communion with the principalities and powers of light? Be it that this is, to some extent, only conjecture—yet there is enough of dignity even in conjecture, wherewith to encounter a dream. I repeat it—astronomy has nothing to say against the Bible, but much in its favour. I love to walk around beneath this luminous arch, and to look at it as a mirror that reflects the glory of redemption. I love to see the moon walking in her beauty, I love to linger upon the glorious milky way, I love to let my eye traverse, even to the remotest boundary, this field of suns and stars, enlarged to the utmost by telescopic powers, and to contemplate it all as a part, and only a part, of the dominion, not only of my Creator but of my Redeemer; as illustrating the surpassing greatness of that plan of mercy by which I hope to be saved. I thank God that when I study the heavens, I find no other Theology there than that which the Bible teaches; and I come back to the Bible with a still firmer conviction that the Being who produced it is the same by whom the moon and the stars were ordained.

I may not enlarge farther upon the charac-

teristics of theological science, but must hasten to relieve your patience by hinting at some of its *USES*. Suffer me, however, before attempting to do this, to premise a single word in respect to the manner in which Theology must be studied, that its legitimate advantages may be secured.

Let me say then, it must be studied with a suitable appreciation of its importance. It must be borne in mind that it as far exceeds all other sciences, as the interests of eternity exceed the interests of time; especially that the truths which it involves have a direct practical and personal bearing upon every human being. It must be studied with an implicit confidence in the divine testimony: the point being once settled that the Bible contains a revelation from God, the simple question must be in respect to the meaning of the record—it is for reason to decide what the record contains—it is for faith to receive it with the simplicity of a little child. It must be studied with the aid of all the helps within our reach; for though we have a right to sit in judgment on the productions of uninspired men, and indeed have no right to receive



them merely upon trust, yet they may often prove to us fountains of light. And finally, it must be studied with fervent prayer to the Father of lights for that spiritual illumination—that guidance into all truth, which is promised to the meek, the humble, the earnest disciple. Remember, my young friends, that none of all the great ends which theological science is designed to answer, can ever be accomplished, if it is regarded as a mere intellectual exercise: you must recognize its dread relations to your own spirit; its influence must penetrate into the secret chambers of your soul—to the very fountains of thought and feeling, or your attainments, however extensive, will only minister to an aggravated condemnation.

In adverting to some of the uses of theological science, it is obvious to remark that it is of peculiar importance to that class of young men who intend to give their lives to the ministry. Unhappily there is no lack of examples by which to demonstrate the folly of persons entering the sacred office with the most slender theological attainments: they set up to be teachers when they need to be

taught ; and the consequence is, not only that they always remain at a low point both of respectability and of usefulness, despite even of what genius may, in some cases, do to supply the deficiency, but they actually bring dishonour upon their holy vocation—they blunt the edge of the sword of the Spirit ; they throw an unnatural feebleness into God's own ordinance, which He designed should operate with mighty power. Possibly it may occur to you that these remarks are scarcely appropriate here, on the ground that this is not the place to study divinity, and that you are looking forward to a regular theological course as preparatory to your occupying the pulpit. But believe me, your theological course may begin, ought to begin, even here ; that is, you may connect, should connect, more or less of theological reading with your literary and scientific pursuits ; especially should you read with attention some portion of the Bible every day, and *that* as a source of theological knowledge, as well as of spiritual improvement. And let me say, the relish that you contract for this kind of study while you are in college, may not improbably decide, in a

great measure, the spirit with which you will hereafter pursue your theological course, and ultimately the extent of your theological attainments, and even the amount of your ministerial usefulness.

But, as I intimated at the commencement of my discourse, it is not to ministers alone that a knowledge of this noble science is important: listen then to two or three considerations which may illustrate its utility to all classes.

The first is, that it is adapted to purify the intellectual vision. It is a law of our nature that, while the heart receives impressions through the medium of the intellect, the intellect in turn is affected, in no small degree, by the state of the heart. We have seen that the influence which Theology is fitted to exert upon the heart is a quickening and purifying influence; and that that state of the affections which is hereby produced, necessarily reacts with mighty power to invigorate and improve the intellectual faculties. The consequence is that the mind that is not only familiar with divine truth, but is habitually under its practical influence, is better prepared for the

investigation of truth of every other kind ; inasmuch as the passions are supposed to be quiet, the conscience in a good degree void of offence, and the whole inner man in a state favourable to close attention and earnest effort. I know that other causes may operate, do operate, to waken men's minds into vigorous exercise ; but this fact does not militate against my position—it still remains true that divine truth works wonders upon man's intellect, and that those who have intellectually accomplished most for the world, are those whose minds and hearts have been open to the Theology of the Bible.

Another advantage arising from the study of this science is, that it gives a greatly increased value to every other branch of knowledge. Human science of every kind has its use ; but when viewed merely by itself, it looks not beyond the convenience and comfort of the present life. Astronomy ascertains the laws of the heavens, and reveals to our vision and our admiration a vast field of light and beauty. Chemistry investigates the composition of material substances, and explains the changes which occur in their constituent parts. Bot-

any describes and arranges the plants and the flowers that regale us by their beauty and fragrance. Geology carries its torch into the very bowels of the earth, and shows us the formation and structure, the position and direction, of the various substances which compose it. Philosophy, in its application to the mind, analyzes its various faculties, and searches out, so far as it may, the causes of all the phenomena of the intellectual man. Now, if any or all these sciences be considered apart from Theology, you do not get even a glimpse of their real glory—they have manifestly an ultimate reference to something which your thoughts do not reach. But let Theology appropriate them to her use—let *her* say what the philosophy both of the material and of the immaterial is good for, and you shall see both the one and the other gathering to themselves fresh dignity, as they brighten into a glorious illustration of the perfections of God. Theology stands by the astronomer, as he searches out new wonders in the heavens, and tells him that in every star that glitters is to be seen the hand of his heavenly Father. Theology accompanies the botanist in his excursions over

the hills and through the vallies, and reminds him that each lovely tint on each blooming flower, is a witness to God's abounding love. Theology whispers in the ear of the philosopher that those noble faculties which constitute the subject of his inquiry, are kindled up for an eternal existence, and mark him for a glorious or an awful destiny. Theology sits by the side of the historian, when he makes out the record of the virtues and vices, the achievements and sufferings, of past generations, and counsels him to remember that that is only the record of what has been accomplished, or permitted, or overruled, by an ever wise and active providence. Theology puts herself in communion even with the man of taste and imagination, with the votary of music and poetry and eloquence, and points upward to that more perfect state, in which there will be every thing to enrapture and refine and exalt. In a word, be your acquisitions what they may, Theology will add incomparably to their value, by connecting with them the idea of God and of eternity.

Theological science pursued with a right spirit, is fitted at once to humble and exalt man.

It is fitted to humble him, inasmuch as it furnishes him with a striking illustration of the feebleness of his own powers. Hast thou, by unyielding perseverance, made thyself a Bacon in the philosophy of mind, or a Cuvier in the philosophy of matter; and hast thou begun, in the spirit of vain glory, to repose in the unworthy reflection that thou canst climb every height and fathom every depth; and art thou ready to bow down in a sort of idolatrous homage before thine own intellect—come then to the Bible, and set thyself to grapple with some of its mysteries, and in the result thou shalt have a demonstration of thine intellectual impotence. Thou canst not proceed a step farther than the lamp of inspiration guides thee; thou hast laboured and laboured to scatter that darkness, but it remains as thick and deep as ever. And when Theology has taught thee thine ignorance, let it teach thee thine unworthiness also; for it is a mirror into which thou canst not look, but the features of moral deformity force themselves upon thee. I will say nothing here of the direct representations which Theology gives of the character of man; but look you

at the character of God—contemplate his omniscience, his purity, his majesty, and say whether Job was not justified when he declared, in a similar view, that he abhorred himself, and repented in dust and ashes. Contemplate the mighty sacrifice that has been made for man's redemption, and say what the character of man must be, when no less sacrifice than this could avail for his deliverance. Contemplate the description which the Bible has given of the woes upon woes that must constitute the final doom of the ungodly; and say what must be the measure of guilt, with which unrepenting, unrenewed man is chargeable. Suppose thou art thyself already enrolled among the saved, yet time has been when thou wert an alien under the curse; and if thou art asked for the history of the change, thine answer is, "By the grace of God I am what I am." Oh yes, there is every thing in Theology to make man humble. Let him study it then, for the garments of humility become him.

And yet it exalts as well as humbles. Nay there is exaltation in the very humiliation; for in those abasing views which Theology gives



man of himself, there is an influence that elevates him into an intimate communion with God; that transforms him into a near resemblance to God. And how can it be otherwise than that that mind should be exalted, that lives habitually in a region of pure and sublime thought; that finds its frequent, even its daily employment, in investigating those subjects into which angels desire to look? Be it so that such a mind may inhabit a feeble and crazy frame; be it that it may be associated with earthly poverty, and be the object of earthly scorn, and be as little heeded by the votaries of fashion and vanity, as if it were nothing better than the soul of the beast that goeth downward—still there is an inherent dignity and excellence in that mind, which renders it a grateful object to the eye of angels, and which will hereafter secure to it a place among the bright ministers around the throne. Study the science of Theology—study it with a right spirit; for it will exalt thee even to Heaven.

And this leads me to say that the study of Theology commends itself to our regard, as an important part of our training for immortality.

What are the inhabitants of Heaven but a vast theological society, prosecuting their researches in the light of the throne and the light of the Lamb? What are all those shining ranks of angels—what the cherubim that smile—what the seraphim that glow—what the ransomed bearing palms and wearing crowns, with CALVARY inscribed upon them—what are all these, I ask, but a great company which no man can number, of theological students, whose faculties are to be employed forever in penetrating farther and farther into the depths of the divine character and government? *There* is creation, providence, redemption—each a glorious volume, spread out by the divine hand, to awaken and employ all the energies of those immortal minds; and when each shall have been studied millions of ages, and shall have given forth continually new treasures of light and glory, all the depths of the Godhead will still remain to be explored. If such then is to be the everlasting employment of the inhabitants of Heaven, how fitting that those inhabitants of earth who expect ere long to join that glorified community, should familiarize themselves to this employment, in the

prospect of the transition that awaits them! If it is desirable that the student who comes to college, should have had his mind disciplined, in some degree, by previous study, in order that he may make the best use of the advantages for intellectual culture which are here enjoyed, is it not of infinitely greater moment that he who is to find his everlasting employment and enjoyment in being a student of God's works and ways, should enter upon the next stage of his existence, with faculties as enlarged, with affections as pure, as the most diligent and devout contemplation of God's truth can produce?

I must stop here, young gentlemen, for I have already detained you too long; and besides, we have reached a point at which, of all others, I could desire to leave you—a point from which your eye is fixed upon Heaven. To Heaven then, let it be directed, as the eye of a pilgrim is directed to some good land toward which he is travelling. When you are oppressed with a sense of the imperfection of your knowledge, and the weakness of your faculties, look up to Heaven as a region where you shall no longer see through a glass darkly,

and where your faculties shall operate with an unwearied and immortal energy. When life's cares and griefs weigh upon you, look up to Heaven, and remember that there the weary and sorrowful find rest. When you come to be separated in life, and thrown into different spheres and different regions, look up to Heaven as the place where all the faithful shall meet at last. But forget not that Heaven shall be the home of the faithful only; that for those who trust not, obey not, there remaineth an inheritance of perpetual sadness. Reigning Saviour, make them all thy trusting and obedient disciples, that they may honour thee by acceptable service on earth, and ascend and dwell with thee afterwards!

