

THEOLOGICAL QUARTERLY.

VOL. I.

OCTOBER 1897.

No. 4.

Doctrinal Theology.

BIBLIOLOGY.

(Concluded.)

The doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture, the essentials of which have been presented in our last issue, is the cardinal topic of Bibliology. According to this doctrine, the Bible was written by divine inspiration¹⁾ inasmuch as the inspired penmen²⁾ performed their work as the personal organs³⁾ of God,⁴⁾ especially of the Holy Spirit,⁵⁾ who not only prompted and actuated them toward writing what they wrote,⁶⁾ but also suggested to them both the thoughts and the words they uttered as they wrote.⁷⁾

1) 1 Tim. 3, 16.

2) Rom. 15, 15. 1 Cor. 5, 9. 2 Cor. 2, 3. 4. 9. Gal. 1, 20. Phil. 3, 1. 1 Tim. 3, 14. 1 John 1, 4; 2, 1. 13. John 5, 46. 47. Luke 3, 4. Matt. 13, 14; 15, 7. Luke 20, 42.

3) Matt. 2, 5. 17; 8, 17; 12, 17; 13, 35; 24, 15; 27, 9. 35. Acts 2, 16; al.

4) Matt. 1, 22. Acts 4, 24. 25. Hebr. 4, 7. Rom. 9, 25; 1, 2.

5) Acts 1, 16; 28, 25. 2 Sam. 23, 1. 2. 2 Pet. 1, 19—21. 1 Pet. 1, 11. 12. Matt. 13, 11. Luke 12, 12.

6) 2 Pet. 1, 21. 2 Tim. 3, 16. Rom. 15, 18. 19. Gal. 1, 11. Jer. 30, 2.

7) Jer. 30, 2. Rom. 15, 18. 1 Thess. 2, 13. Acts 2, 4. 2 Pet. 1, 19—21. John 10, 34. 35. Matt. 22, 43. 44. Rom. 15, 9—12. Gal. 3, 16. Rom. 10, 16. 1 Pet. 3, 6. Heb. 12, 26. 27; 8, 8. 13; 7, 20. 21; 4, 7. Rom. 4, 6. 7. 9. Eph. 4, 8. 9. John 7, 42. Luke 16, 17.

Exegetical Theology.

FUNDAMENTALS OF INTERPRETATION.

*Signum est, quod sub sensum aliquem cadit, et quiddam significat.*¹⁾ This is a part of an exquisite definition of the fundamental idea which underlies all interpretation of whatever kind, and with which every theory of interpretation must in some manner deal. In order to serve as a sign, a thing must enter between the object signified or indicated and the sense or the mind of the subject which by such sign becomes cognizant of such object. A thing which itself cannot be perceived is not and cannot be a sign. But being an object of perception does not suffice to constitute a thing a sign; there must be something beyond the sign, some object, the existence and nature of which is by such sign indicated to the individual who perceives the sign. The sign in its very nature of a sign presupposes its perceptibility to the individual or individuals to whom it is to serve as a sign, and a certain relation to the object which it is to signify or of which it is to convey a knowledge to those by whom the sign is perceived. Thus the symptoms of a disease are phenomena appearing in the patient; they are not, however, the malady itself, but functional abnormalities indicative of the disease whereby the symptoms are caused, and the diagnosis of the case will comprise *two* processes, that of perceiving or observing the symptoms, and that of determining the cause or causes of the phenomena perceived. A failure to notice the diacritical symptom or symptoms of a case, and a failure to find the true cause of the symptoms noticed, will both result in an erroneous

1) Cicero, de inventione rhet., 48. "That is a sign, which falls under some sense, and indicates something."

diagnosis. A collision of vessels at sea may be due to the fact that one of the ships has given a false signal or none at all; but it may result from one or the other of two causes where all the signals have been given and correctly given: the other ship may have either failed to notice the signal given, or it may have misunderstood the signal noticed, assigning to it a meaning different from that which it was intended to express.

We say, "intended to express." For in this a nautical signal differs from a symptom of disease, that the functional abnormality which constitutes a symptom is due to natural causes independent of the direct influence of human volition, while into the nature of the signal the will of a rational being has entered, coupling with the phenomena of the sign a certain intended meaning or determined purpose which has thus been made the import of the sign. When a child, by tugging at the signal rope, makes the whistle of a steamship blow, that is not properly a nautical signal, though it may be a sign to the captain that some one is at the rope. But when the master of the ship pulls the same rope and sounds the same whistle as another ship is approaching, there is a certain, definite meaning connected with the blast or blasts, a purpose of conveying to the master of the other ship certain information as to the side he intends to take in passing the other vessel and the side he would have the other vessel take in passing him. But the signal again implies the essentials of a sign as given in Cicero's definition; the party who gives the signal supposes that the party to whom the signal is given will perceive what we would term the *materiale* of the sign, which is in this case the blast of a steam whistle, and that he will associate therewith the *formale*, the intended meaning and purpose manifested or signified by such blast.

From these considerations it will appear that the fitness of a sign to serve as a sign lies in these two properties, viz., its perceptibility, and its significance. A thing which

is easily and distinctly perceptible is, other things being equal, a more serviceable sign than a thing which would easily escape our notice. Signal lights by day would be of little if any use, and by night they are of increased usefulness by being elevated in light-houses or on the masts of light-ships and thus rendered more readily visible at a distance. The stars are eminently qualified to "be for signs"¹⁾ because of their positions in the heavens and their brilliancy. A buoy may be rendered more serviceable by providing it with a bell or a whistling apparatus, the signal being thus both visible and audible. A tower clock is improved by translucent dials which can be illuminated by night, and a clock which strikes the hours besides indicating them by the hands is the more useful by being the more variously perceptible.

But high and various perceptibility is not the only excellence of sign. A highly perceptible sign may give very limited or unsatisfactory service. Electric lights have not largely taken the place of lamp-lights as marine signals. A fire on a mountain top may under certain circumstances and for certain purposes be a very efficient sign; but the circumstances and purposes calling for such a sign are of rare occurrence, and it would under ordinary circumstances be no sign at all, but an amusement to those who had kindled it and a puzzle or an amusement to those who beheld it in the valley far below, wondering what it meant or surmising that probably it did not mean anything. A phenomenon must be significant to be a sign, and distinctly and with a degree of certainty significant to be a serviceable sign. A headache may indicate a cold in the head, or it may be a symptom of heart disease, or of typhus, or of indigestion. But a slight swelling around the ankles may be a diacritical symptom in a case of diseased kidneys, and dilated pupils which will not respond to the light, a sure indication of

1) Gen. 1, 14.

brain trouble complicating a case of dysentery, though these signs are less easily perceptible than many others of less grave significance.

It is the same with intentional signs. A good military signal by drum or trumpet must be definite, conveying a certain, established meaning, being tantamount to an order or command which must be conformed with by those for whom the signal is intended. Military and naval signals, the peculiar significance of which is not sufficiently clear, are not only of doubtful usefulness, but may be positively dangerous and should be abolished.

On the other hand, the most highly significant signs are as such only signs. In order that they should be put to their proper use, they must not only be perceived as phenomena, but the mind which perceives them must also associate with them that which lies beyond the phenomena and is by them indicated. In other words, signs of whatever kind, if they should serve and be utilized as signs, must be INTERPRETED. A peculiar sunset may be observed by a lover of nature, or by a painter, as an object of beauty, and be enjoyed and represented on canvas for the enjoyment of others. But he who looks beyond the phenomenon, to whom this sunset is indicative of approaching rain, does more than behold the colors in the western sky; he interprets what he sees by associating in his mind what according to his experience or the information he has obtained is likely to follow a sunset of this description: a rainy day or night. The physician who makes a diagnosis will not only perceive the accelerated pulse and respiration and increased temperature, but associates with these phenomena the notion of inflammation or septicaemia which according to his professional judgment was liable to set in under the prevailing circumstances of the case. The passengers spending the evening on deck may see the beacon lights appearing in the distance, knowing little of their peculiar significance, but the pilot at the wheel interprets the phenomena and in his

mind associates with them the meaning of those lights, the warnings they imply, the course they prescribe, and the points at which the course must be changed as other lights appear. Thus the physician and the pilot are interpreters of signs, not chiefly inasmuch as they perceive the phenomena. It is true, the pilot generally sees more lights at the same time than the passengers, since he knows where to look for them, and the physician notices more symptoms in his patient than the layman in medicine; but what chiefly makes them interpreters of the signs peculiar to their respective callings is the aptitude to associate in their minds what is suggested by the signs they are accustomed and trained to observe and the exercise of such habitude of mental association. In a similar manner the work of detectives consists very largely in the interpretation of signs, in associating with that which they hear and see that which lies beyond the immediate perception of their senses, the acts and motives of the criminal and his accomplices. And, furthermore, it is by the interpretation of signs that we, all of us, young and old, whatever our occupations or ways of life may be, obtain knowledge of many things not exhibited directly to our senses. Through present phenomena our mind by this process penetrates walls and closed doors and shutters, investigates the past and peers into the future, reads the thoughts and emotions of present and of absent fellowmen, yea what is and has before all time been in the very heart of God.

And now, by far the most extensively used among all the various kinds of signs are the words of human speech. Words are signs; they fall under a sense and signify something. The very word *sign*, Latin *signum*, is of the same root with the Sanskrit *sukaj*, to indicate, announce, Norw. *sige*, Low German *seggen*, High German *sagen*, Engl. *say*. When we *say* something, we make a sign or a number of signs signifying that which we have to say. The sounds alone are not words, and our notions or conceptions alone

are not words. A number of sounds arbitrarily joined together, as, "*rariro tootligo*," are, for all we know, words of no language living or dead. "*Baban beshmaia, hal ellan lechma sengana kulle yuma*," pronounced by an Englishman, knowing no language but his own, are *sine mente soni*, by which he *says* nothing to another Englishman of the same description who may hear the sounds; but when pronounced by a modern Chaldean, they are *words*, by which he *says*, "Our Father in heaven, give us every day our daily bread." A young child, though in possession of normal organs of speech, is an "infant," *infans*, a being which "does not speak," and that for two reasons: it has nothing or little to say, its mind being destitute of conscious ideas or notions, and it is ignorant of the proper means whereby it might utter what little is in its mind and untrained in the use of the organs whereby the sounds of words are produced. Men and women with a narrow mental horizon have a comparatively scanty vocabulary at their command; it is said that there are Englishmen who use but little more than three hundred of the hundred thousand current words of the English language. "Men of moderate passions employ few epithets, with verbs and substantives of mild significations; excitable men use numerous intensives, and words of strong and stirring meanings. Loose thinkers content themselves with a single expression for a large class of related ideas; logical men scrupulously select the precise word which corresponds to the thought they utter."¹⁾ The rich vocabulary of classical Greek afforded no word for the Christian virtue of humility, simply because the Greek mind had never conceived that notion for which the Holy Spirit coined the word *ταπεινοφροσύνη*.²⁾

All these observations and many others we might make in this connection square and tally with our theory of inter-

1) Marsh, Lectures on the Engl. Language, p. 183.

2) Acts 20, 19. Eph. 4, 2. Phil. 2, 3. Col. 2, 18, 23; 3, 12. 1 Pet. 5, 5.

pretation based on the nature of signs. Being signs, words must "fall under some sense," either the sense of hearing as spoken words, or the sense of sight as written words, or the sense of touch as embossed words intended for the blind. But what is heard or seen or felt is not the word in its entire concept, but only the *materiale* thereof, the *formale* being its peculiar signification or sense, and both together constitute the word. To understand or interpret the words, the hearer or reader or interpreter must in the first place perceive that element of the word which falls under the sense to which it is directed, the sounds, or the characters representing the sounds, and this perception must be distinct as to the forms and positions of the words, their etymological structure and syntactical arrangement. To the interpreter of words nothing must be insignificant, no article or pronoun, preposition or conjunction, case or number or mood or tense. He must notice that in Matt. 15, 28 the position of the words is not ἡ πίστις σου μεγάλη, but μεγάλη σου ἡ πίστις, which does not say "thy faith is great," but more emphatically, "great is the faith that is in thee." It is very largely this aptitude and habitude of close and minute observation which secures the best results in exegetical work, and this is one reason why careful and thorough grammatical training is one of the requisites of the proper equipment for exegetical theology. A failure to see certain features of a text is an exegetical shortcoming, and a habit to overlook so-called *minutiae* is a serious exegetical defect, resulting in defective interpretation, just as insufficient observation of pathological phenomena will result in a defective diagnosis. Of course, the power of close observation is in a measure a natural talent, and in this respect exegetes as physicians are not made but born. But even mediocre and inferior talents are capable of training, and superior talents are the less efficient for lack of training, and the exegete does not live who is beyond improvement in this point. Especially should a theologian beware

of passing superficially over very familiar texts. However frequently a passage may have been before our eyes, however firmly it may be fixed in our memory, and however carefully we may have at some time scrutinized its every word, we must not for such reasons suppose renewed scrutiny of the words and forms and positions of words superfluous or unprofitable, but "search the Scriptures" again and again and with ever increased attention also with regard to the *material* of these *signs* which were given by inspiration of God for the purpose that by them we should be "made wise unto salvation" and that "in them we should have everlasting life."

The second process which is essential to the interpretation of words as of any other kind of signs consists in associating with the sounds or their representatives that which they are intended to signify. By the signification or sense of a word we do not mean the natural relation of cause and effect, according to which a spoken word may be a sign of the speaker's presence, and a written word, a sign or proof of the mere fact that the writer was alive at a certain time and place, as an inscription engraved on a rock in a polar wilderness may be to an explorer a sign of another human being having been in such place before him. This fact would appear from such inscription irrespective of the particular language used and even though the beholder were totally ignorant of such language. The fact that the inscription was in characters of an alphabet may further indicate that the earlier visitor had not been a savage, but a civilized man, and to draw this conclusion would be a correct interpretation of signs, but it would not be interpretation of *words* as such. Words, whether true or false, are utterances of what is in the speaker's mind as his words are uttered, and to associate this, and all this, and nothing but this, with those words is the interpretation, and the correct interpretation, of the words. To read is properly not only to reproduce the sounds or to gather up the characters

representing them, but it is to associate with those sounds or characters precisely that which was in the speaker's or writer's mind and for the utterance whereof he used those sounds or characters. By the purpose of suggesting to others his thoughts the speaker or writer was prompted in the choice, composition, inflection, and arrangement of his words according to certain linguistic norms the knowledge and application of which on the part of the hearer or reader he presupposed as he gave utterance to his thoughts. When a stranger at the point of accosting a stranger premises the question, "Do you speak English?" the real import of the question is: "Are you in a measure conversant with the established meaning of the signs by which I intend to communicate with you and by which I can not confer with you unless I can proceed on this fundamental supposition?" If the answer were a shake of the head and the words, "Ich bin deutsch," the querist would either abandon the purpose of conversing with the stranger, or, if able to use the stranger's language, he would at once lay aside his English and take up the set and system of signs which will answer the present purpose, signs with which the stranger is accustomed to associate in his own mind the notions or thoughts which the speaker is desirous of communicating on this supposition. Or if the answer had been, "A little," the Englishman might proceed with a trial, and he might fail to make himself understood in some of his utterances for either or both of two reasons, either because he spoke too fast, the stranger being unable to make out or distinguish the signs exhibited in rapid succession or indistinct enunciation—or because among the words employed there were such as lacked suggestiveness to the hearer and failed to induce in his mind the associations established among those who are familiar with the language. But even in reading a language with which we are in a measure acquainted, and in the perusal of works composed in our mother tongue, we will sometimes meet with words whose meaning we do

not grasp. We see the sign, but it leaves a blank in our mind, to fill which we turn to the lexicon which has the signs alphabetically arranged and by its definitions or synonyms supplies our want, just as the keeper of a signal station would turn to the official *Register* for the explanation of a flag signal announcing the arrival or destination of a foreign ship which makes its first appearance off Sandy Hook. A reader untrained in philosophic lore may pore over pages of abstruse philosophy until he will cast aside the book in bewilderment or disgust because of his inability to make out what the author would say. Schopenhauer tells us at the very threshold of his extensive work, "*the World as Will and Idea*," that "it is absolutely impossible to understand the present work properly" without an acquaintance of a certain treatise which the author had written five years earlier; and even then, he says, the book should be read *twice*, and "the first perusal demands patience, founded on the confidence that on a second perusal, much, or all, will appear in an entirely different light."¹) It is impossible to fully understand the dogmaticians of the seventeenth century without a measure of philosophical preparation. And what would most of our educated men and women make out of such modern scientific English as we have quoted in a former issue saying:—

"Begoneaceae, by their authero-connectival fabric indicate a close relationship with anonaceo-hydrocharideonymphaeoid forms, an affinity confirmed by the serpentarioid flexuoso-nodulous stem, the lirioidendroid stipules, and cisoid and victorioid foliage of a certain Begonia, and if considered hypogynous, would in their triquetrous capsule, alate seed, apetalism, and tufted stamination, represent the floral fabric of Nepenthes, itself of aristolochioid affinity, while by its pitched leaves, directly belonging to Sarracenas

1) Arth. Schopenhauer, *the World as Will and Idea*, transl. by Haldane and Kemp, Trübner, II ed. pp. VIII—X.

and Dionaeas.”¹⁾ Neither Webster’s nor Worcester’s nor any other English lexicon, nor all the dictionaries together, will render this passage clear to a reader who has not in his mind certain botanical concepts which will associate themselves with the words and phrases.

What has been said in a general way will again apply to the interpretation of Scripture. A knowledge of the Hebrew characters and the Greek alphabet will not make a man an exegete any more than the ability to distinguish a red light from a blue light and to tell what is right and left will make him a pilot. Even a knowledge of and familiarity with the grammatical structure of the sacred languages cannot suffice, however needful such proficiency has been shown to be. If the words of Scripture are *signs*, the mind of the interpreter must be able to look beyond that which “falls under the senses” to that which is thereby “indicated.” Of the prophets St. Peter says that they “inquired and searched” of the salvation, “searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did *signify* when it testified” etc.²⁾ Thus were they not only prophets, but also interpreters of the prophecies; and thus are we interpreters of Scripture as we search what the Spirit of God does *signify* when he testifies in holy Scripture. With what he sees with his eyes or hears with his ears the interpreter must associate in his mind the notions, concepts, ideas, thoughts indicated by what he sees or hears, and he must associate those notions and thoughts precisely in the relations also indicated by the forms and arrangement of the visible or audible words of the text to be interpreted.

The suggestiveness of the words has its foundation in their etymology and, chiefly, in the *usus* and *modus loquendi* established by the speech of the people whose the language is and by the literature of that language, including the work

1) THEOLOGICAL QUARTERLY, I, p. 150.

2) 1 Pet. 1, 10. 11.

itself which is to be interpreted. It is in the very nature of languages to represent thought, the only thinking creature on earth being also the only speaking creature; and when God would manifest his thoughts to that creature, whom he had endowed with both thought and speech, he spoke to man, not in a Volapük, an artificial system of signs, but in the tongues of nations, languages spoken and written as established vehicles of thought by and among those whose languages they were. Speaking in those languages, God presupposed in those to whom he spoke, or enjoined upon them, an acquaintance also with the peculiar suggestiveness of the words and phrases of such languages, and took into account the laws of association which he has laid down in the human mind. Where the established *usus loquendi* was not adequate to the present purpose, God furthermore turned to his account the elasticity and pliability of language, whereby languages admit of increase of vocabulary and of variations and modifications in the use of words, again along the lines and according to the laws of association which underlie and govern the use of words as of every other kind of signs.

From all this it should be clear that the interpretation of Scripture is in no way an arbitrary performance. In the first place, it is of the very nature of Scripture, as a revelation in signs, that it should be interpreted; in giving us Scripture God has *ipso facto* enjoined upon us its interpretation. Again, there can be no license or looseness permissible in the manner of performing this task and duty. The words of the text are fixed, and no man is at liberty to change a tittle of these signs which God himself has set and arranged. To suppose that the thoughts of Scripture may be inspired, but not the words, is incompatible with the very concept of *scripture*, a written word of God. Our assurance of the divine authority, the unquestionable reliability of the truths laid down in the Bible rests first of all on the divine authority and unquestionable reliability of the *words* from which alone those truths can be ascertained.

Nor is the meaning of those words a variable quantity. The signification of these signs was determined when the signs were given by inspiration of God, and while these signs are what they are, that signification is the same to-day and will be the same forever. Of two or more different interpretations all may be wrong, but one only can be right, and what the text is thereby understood to say is true, being what God would have us know and hold, because "thus saith the Lord." Note the great advantage of a written word. A spoken word may be remembered, but it can "fall under the sense" but once, as sound is a very transient thing. To remember it exactly afterwards, the hearer must rely on his memory. The written word is different. It is a stationary sign. It can be viewed to-day, to-morrow, in prosperity, in adversity, in moments of assurance, in moments of doubt—ever the same. Thus we may more fully understand St. Peter when, having referred to that grand revelation so vividly impressed upon his memory, when Jesus Christ received from the Father honor and glory and the testimony of the beloved Son of God, he continues: "We have also a *more sure* word of prophecy," referring to the word of *Scripture*, which shineth as a light in a dark place, until the day dawn and the daystar rise in our hearts.¹⁾

A. G.

1) 2 Pet. 1, 16—19.
