

THE  
SACRED SCRIPTURES  
AND  
PAGAN MYTHOLOGY:

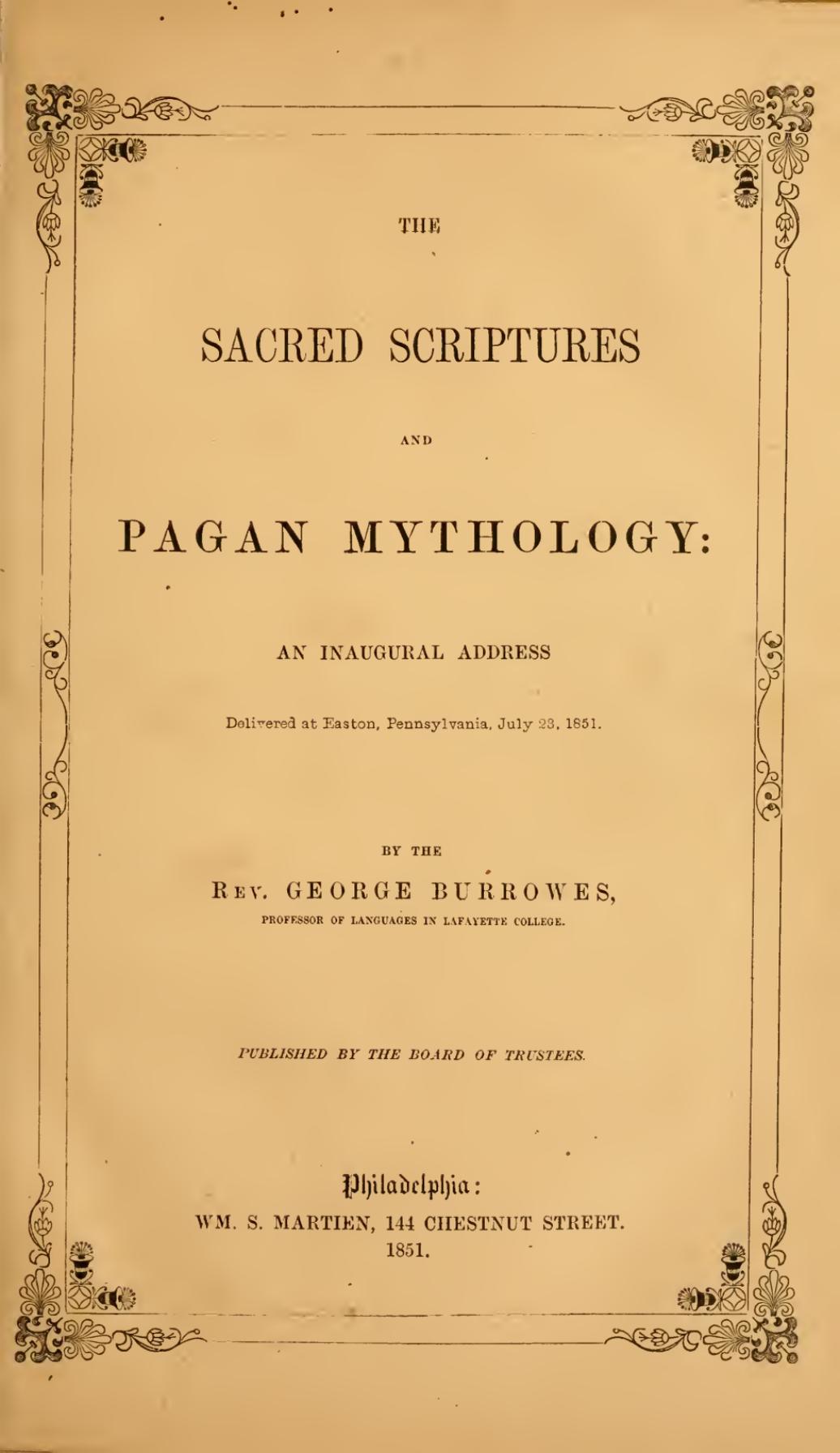
AN INAUGURAL ADDRESS

Delivered at Easton, Pennsylvania, July 23, 1851.

BY THE  
REV. GEORGE BURROWES,  
PROFESSOR OF LANGUAGES IN LAFAYETTE COLLEGE.

*PUBLISHED BY THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES.*

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WM. S. MARTIEN, 144 CHESTNUT STREET.  
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## A D D R E S S .

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PERSONS of piety, admitting the importance of classical pursuits, fail not unfrequently to notice the bearing had on each other by the religious systems, and by the literature of Christianity and paganism. The present seems a fit time for inquiring, what place the Sacred Scriptures should hold among classical studies—what advantage is derived from a knowledge of pagan mythology, especially by the Christian minister. The fact seems now not a little surprising that, for so many ages, man should have fallen into such errors concerning the solar system and the starry heavens, satisfied, even after the true theory had been suggested by the sage of Crotona, to dream, among other fancies more astray from truth, that our earth is the centre of the revolutions of all worlds. Nor is the day distant when there will be greater wonder that the word of God could ever have been to such an extent crowded from courses of education—when this volume will be universally received as the centre of every course of training, literary or otherwise, for the young; and all other volumes, all other studies, however important, will be viewed as secondaries, revolving in established tracks around this central sun. The right-hearted classical scholar will feel the Bible furnishes the only clew for threading the labyrinth of heathen antiquity, and discovering the truth hid in the beautiful fictions of mythology; the intelligent student of the Scriptures will be sensible of the importance of acquaintance with those works of genius, for disciplining the mind and forming the taste—still further for enabling him to understand the system of error and idolatry from which the Christian religion was intended to give us deliverance by counteracting its influence and accomplishing its overthrow.

The inquiries here suggested we shall be able to answer by

calling to mind whence sprung the peculiar doctrines, ceremonies, and legends prevailing in the pagan world. Far indeed are those idolatrous systems, with their incongruous mixture of beauties and abominations, from taking their peculiar development without the action of some cause and controlling laws. There is a marvellous likeness among the various theological notions of pagan nations, in different ages, no less than in different countries—the present worship of idolatrous India showing features kindred to those of ancient heathendom, and proving that both sprung, as certainly as did those of Greece and Rome, from a common origin, under the action of common principles in the corrupt nature of man.

Formed for studying the character of God, and for his worship, the soul when broken off from this by sin, must have something to love and worship in place of the Creator. There is in the heart a natural propensity to cherish the memory of benefactors; and when not controlled by grace, the mind even in Christian lands, hoards with almost idolatrous reverence the remembrance of loved ones numbered with the dead. There are countries where the principle of the household gods of the ancients, their Lares and Penates, still prevails, and the memory of deceased ancestors is cherished by religious festivals and pious duties. Strong as is this principle by nature, it acts with far more vigour when those parents have been distinguished actors in events of great importance and have laid the foundation of eminent blessings for posterity. Now, while sin keeps up in the soul an inveterate tendency to fall away from God, this feeling prompts the mind, thus sinking into the abyss of guilt and darkness, to cling with a reverence soon running into worship, to those who, while infinitely inferior to God, are superior to us by having been the means of giving us being. On them, is gradually lavished the worship due to Jehovah. We can hardly conceive with what power this propensity must have operated during the first ages of the world, in reference to those ancestors who had shared in the expulsion from Eden, and in

the salvation of mankind at the flood. Raising their forefathers to the rank of venerated beings of a higher sphere, and then to the grade of deified heroes, the soul with grasp broken loose from the true God, gathered the tendrils of its thoughts and affections around these, incorporating with the purity of the original truth the suggestions arising from time to time from the deepening corruptions of the heart.

When man fell, and promise was given of restoration by a Redeemer, there was a necessity for a new way of approaching God, and for a mode of worship different from that had by our first parents worshipping in Eden. This new way then, showing the first germ of what was afterwards fully unfolded in Jesus Christ, had its ritual and ceremonies, all suited to shadow forth in an incipient state the truths afterwards incorporated in the Levitical dispensation, and reaching a perfect development in the "last days" of the gospel. The different nations of the world, diverging from the parent stock of a single family, carried with them the knowledge of this primitive patriarchal worship; and as generation after generation departed from the true faith, their religion would take the form of a system combining a mixture of truth and error, wherein traces would appear more and more faint with each passing age, of the truths and ceremonies of the worship of the true God, blended with such errors as spring from raising men to the rank of beings claiming divine reverence, and incorporating with the worship of these the worship of the elements and other works of the one living Creator. The aboriginal gods of the pagans were deified mortals. According to Hesiod,\*

When o'er those blessed ones of the golden age,  
Gathered death's evening shades, their souls made free  
Demons became, still hovering o'er the world,  
Kindly disposed, from ill defending, guards  
Of mortals frail, and with the kingly power  
Of granting wealth, upholding righteous laws.

Without mentioning Cicero, Plutarch, and Augustine, we find the most ancient writer after Moses, the Phœnician known

\* Op. et Die. 107.

through his translator. Philo, advancing the same opinion. Such being the fact, the early gods will be found those who flourished in the two golden ages of the pagan mythology, periods agreeing with the first creation of our race, and with the time immediately after the deluge—the same persons deified of whom we have the true account, separated from all fable, only in the Scriptures. The leading deities were the patriarchs with their three sons; and from these, not from any idea had of the doctrine of the Trinity, came the famous triads of the heathen. The nature of their festivals and sacrifices shows more clearly than the testimony of ancient writers the sameness of a deity among pagan nations. The names Phœbus, Serapis, Osiris, Typhon, Mithras, Ammon, Adonis, Bacchus, Dionysus, Liber, Dis, Pluto, Pan, Zeus, Jupiter, are different names of the same deity.

A favourite emblem through which God has manifested his character to man, is fire. The pillar of fire was the centre of the Mosaic ritual and the Jewish Theocracy. Tracing it back to the early ages of the patriarchal church, we find its first manifestation in the flaming sword of Eden. This, with the cherubim, sacrifices, and other things afterwards incorporated with additional rites in the Levitical services, was one of the appointments of God, when giving our race a new form of worship under the plan of redemption. When the descendants of Adam, “going out from the presence of the Lord, set up a worship of their own by adulterating with their own errors the true system in which they had been reared, they would naturally seek for something which might hold in their idolatry the place held in the true religion by the Shechinah. This the sun most nearly resembled, and furnished, therefore, a not inappropriate substitute. Hence began the worship of the heavenly bodies. The members of the patriarchal church, equally with the Jews in later ages, felt that God dwelt in the pillar of fire; and these apostates naturally located their deified ancestors in the sun and other heavenly bodies, as their place of eternal abode. In this

mode did sacrifices, and those strange symbolical figures, corruptions of the cherubim, with other rites and legends, strange distortions of Scripture facts, gain prevalence throughout the heathen world. Paganism is patriarchy in caricature or masquerade. All the religions of heathenism are adulterations of the truths of revelation with the errors of man's sinful heart—of the truths which were first given to mankind during the patriarchal church and afterwards committed to writing in the Levitical and Christian dispensations.

Now it has been settled by the practice of the most polished Christian nations for ages, that the study of pagan literature should constitute an important part of a finished education. The necessity, the grounds for this, we need not now examine. No argument is necessary for showing the importance of an acquaintance with the poetry, the history, the eloquence, the philosophy of Greece and Rome. He who controls the destinies of man, made the Jews the depositaries of the moral and religious instructions for saving our race. Those nations he used as instruments for revealing the truths intended for training and polishing the intellect; to the latter we go for cultivating the heart, to the former for training the mind. The literature of these different nations should not be looked upon as antagonistic, one of which should be studied, and the other neglected; but as parts of the one system appointed by the Creator for training man to be entirely a man, for developing his intellect and his heart, and thus bringing forth the most perfect specimen of manhood. Neither the most cultivated pagan nor the noblest Jew could furnish the finest development of human nature; one wanted the action of an element enjoyed by the other alone; and not till man possesses the advantages had from both these channels of learning, does humanity reach its noblest elevation—such as could never be reached in heathenism, such as was never known under Judaism alone, such as is beheld in the son of Israel who enjoyed the benefits springing from a knowledge of classical literature, the Apostle Paul.

But Grecian antiquity, and this is the parent of Roman antiquity, cannot be understood without acquaintance with Grecian religion. "It begins," says Grote, "with gods, and it ends with historical men; the former being recognized not simply as gods, but as primitive ancestors, and connected with the latter by a long mythical genealogy, partly heroic and partly human." For wise reasons those classical treasures are found imbedded in strata of religious errors, wherein remains not a single discernible remnant of truth concerning the living God. So perfectly is this the case, that a step cannot be taken without the necessity of separating truth from error. Herein the mind has exercise from earliest years in that which is so essential and unavoidable a duty through life, the sifting of truth from error. With Milton "I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race where that immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat. Assuredly we bring not innocence into the world; we bring impurity much rather; that which purifies us is trial, and trial is by what is contrary; which was the reason why our sage and serious poet Spencer—whom I dare be known to think a better teacher than Scotus or Aquinas—describing true temperance under the person of Guion, brings him in with his palmer through the cave of Mammon, and the bower of earthly bliss, that he might see and know, and yet abstain. The knowledge and survey of vice is in this world necessary to the constituting of human virtue, and the scanning of error to the confirmation of truth."

How must an understanding be got of this pagan religion? Originating in the way already shown, this corrupt theology cannot be thoroughly understood without the Holy Scriptures. Those various systems as formerly existing in Chaldea, Egypt, Syria, Greece, and Rome, as now existing in India, have all a likeness, showing that they sprung from a common source, and hardly differing more than the races of men descended

from the two exiles of Eden. The curious mind, anxious for a knowledge of the theological systems which affected so deeply the intellectual and political condition of the States of antiquity, is not satisfied with the literature and fictions of their mythology, however entertaining and beautiful, but seeks to know how those theories were formed, whence they sprung. Feeling those fables have been woven by the imagination, he is aware the imagination cannot originate new forms or beings, can do nothing more than bring into new combinations ideas already acquired, and hence must have had some materials wherewith to start and on which to work. That gorgeous mass of absurdity, error, and death, was for ages accumulating and taking its present form; the starting point was the time when our race apostatized from God, and began to form for themselves a religion. This period is known to us only through the Scriptures. They give, free from all error, from all drapery of fancy, pure, simple, and beautiful as a statue of Parian marble, the truths of religion from which man fell, and the facts connected with the personages whom the darkening mind of man first raised to the pedestal from which he had dethroned the true God. The classical student finds himself in a region of the dead, surrounded with wonders, with mysteries, and with beauties—with mythological personages named divinities, crowding around like mummies in the receptacles of Egypt's dead:—he feels these things, however strange their appearance as embalmed in numerous folds of allegory, were once living beings; he would be acquainted with their origin and history. All is darkness and confusion, until the Scriptures come and set before him those beings unwrapped, separated from all adhesion of error, in the simplicity of their original life. The hieroglyphics every where written on this pantheon, the Bible alone enables him to decipher. Like the regions to which Æneas was descending, where gloom and unearthly sights and sounds were commingled with fields of the blessed and the shades of the glorious dead, to the secrets of which this pious hero could not penetrate

without a bough broken from a sacred tree—the domains of pagan mythology are diversified realms of ignorance, terror, and death, wherein expand before the imagination scenes more beautiful than the Elysian fields, but not capable of being seen with satisfaction and safety without the mysterious branch which can be plucked only from a single sacred tree on earth, that tree the Sacred Scriptures. In this no less than every other exploration among the ruins of sin on earth, the divine word alone is a lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our path. In studying the idolatry of the world,

“Through many a dark and dreary vale  
We pass, and many a region dolorous,  
O'er many a frozen, many a fiery Alp,  
Rocks, caves, lakes, fens, bogs, dens, and shades of death  
Where all life dies, death lives, and nature breeds  
Perverse, all monstrous, all prodigious things,  
Gorgons and Hydras, and Chimeras dire;”—

with the wise men of the east ending their wanderings with gold and frankincense offered at the feet of Jesus, in all these searches for truth the light of revelation is our guiding star.

The philosophy of mythology cannot be satisfactorily touched without the Scriptures. The food, the pabulum of the mind is truth. There is a pleasure in studying the pagan theology as a fact in the history of error; there is additional satisfaction and instruction in reaching the truth overlaid by this mass of error. With what anxiety had search been made for the age, the builders, the design of the pyramids. How eagerly was the stone studied and prized which gave the clew to the hieroglyphics of Egypt. He who would give himself to the study of those emblems, and throw away the knowledge furnished by the key, would be considered as wanting sound mind. Here is the remarkable structure of error which, under the name of paganism, has existed down to the present time over the largest portion of mankind—which is deeply interwoven with the politics and literature of the classic nations that have had such influence on the whole civilized world; and what shall be said of studying this system without applying the light thrown thereon by the Scriptures?

Man was formed for the glory of God by pursuing truth, keeping his ways, and, with enlightened love, enjoying what is beautiful in the works of the Creator. Before him was thrown open the universe with its realms of beauty, and truth expanding into what might be called immensity, adapted to the faculties then existing, and thereafter developing in the soul for receiving pleasure from the contemplation and showing forth Jehovah's praise. By sin, our race was cut off from these numberless springs of enjoyment, and confined to the gloom and error of this dark earth, our prison, with few rays of light and beauty, save the gleams occasionally caught through the bars of our dungeon. The living world of angels, spiritual beings, and material wonders, lies hid from view by walls impassible. Having sunk to this confinement, with all the faculties of our first creation, we have remaining in the soul the thirst for truth, and a thirst no less strong for what is beautiful. Reason feeds on truth; the imagination feeds on what is beautiful in truth, however variously expressed in the works of God. Had we never sinned—enjoying the freedom of the universe, privileged and welcomed every where, we would have gratified this power to the utmost by the boundless diversity of truth, beauty, and glory, shown in the manifestations of the Godhead. Cast down, however, from our first estate, with mind enfeebled, but faculties unchanged, in lack of aliment of which the soul has been deprived by sin, we grope amid the darkness of our prison in search of what is true and beautiful for satisfying the craving of these powers—a craving never ceasing, never satiated, the purest, strongest desire of our nature, lying as the main-spring of the machinery of our being, so intense as to receive with gladness the dreams of fancy, when the massive truths of God's substantial wisdom is withheld. What are the creations of poetry but efforts for satisfying these faculties with truth invested in beauty? Sin has shut us out from worlds of glory, and has stripped this world of much original splendour. Poetry, the fine arts, try to supply the want, to create new

worlds, to invest scenes, persons, doings here, with attractiveness and beauty greater than seen in nature.

When left for ages to grope around the walls of his prison, man lingered restless and unsatisfied with the creations of genius, with the deductions of philosophy, God made a new revelation in the person of his Son, and embodied in the Scriptures truths designed to prepare us for leaving this dungeon, and mingling freely with the worlds from which we are excluded. In heaven the soul will enjoy the same truths, save in greater richness, which were the joy of Eden, which are now the delight of the sanctified spirit. Here, in the word of God, are those truths from which the mind and imagination of man diverged in wandering into the wilderness of pagan error; here are the truths in a dawning state with which the soul will be delighted in the sinless heavens and earth of the future. Hence in the Scriptures does the heart exult to find in pure and heavenly substance, all that was ever dreamed of by sage and poet in the ages of Greece and Rome. Like the gorgeous scenes in those interesting dissolving views, their fictions have faded into a landscape filled with the reality of truths and visions belonging to another world.

“The intelligible forms of ancient poets,  
The fair humanities of old religion,  
The power, the beauty, and the majesty,  
That had their haunts in dale, or piny mountain,  
Or forest, by slow stream, or pebbly spring,  
Or chasms and watery depths; all these have vanished,  
They live no longer in the faith of reason:”

they have given place to the revelations of the Scriptures, and disappeared with the oracle of Apollo, that withdrew dumb on the coming of Jesus. Here, are found in fact what there existed only in fiction. Here are revealed the golden fruits of the Hesperides growing on the tree of life in the midst of the paradise of God. Here are divulged in far off realms of a better world, islands of the blessed more lovely than the fabled bowers of Atlantis. Here, instead of the shadowy wood-nymphs, we are met by the dazzling hosts seen at Mahanaim, the innumerable company of angels. The dream

of an Apollo exiled from the skies, sojourning on earth in human form, is lost in the splendour of the Godhead dwelling in Him who wept on Olivet, who died on Calvary. Here we come to more than Delphi's shades, to the living oracles where the humblest soul, made a priest to God, has inspiration from the spirit of holiness, and drinks of purer than Castalian dews. Here is heard a harp transcending that of Orpheus, sweetly charming hearts petrified by sin, and drawing them entranced with holy affection around the footsteps of Jesus. The mind absorbed in the agonies of Prometheus Bound, finds the magnificent reality in Him, who, drawing from heaven the fires of the Holy Spirit for giving our race a new life and divine wisdom, was chained to the agonies of the cross and bore our sins in his own body on the tree. The prevalence of the mysteries in the religion of heathenism, shows the natural craving of the mind for something which those services sought, however poorly, to supply. Here, this want, like every other, is met by the revelation made to the soul of the mysteries of godliness, where the hierophant is the Holy Ghost, and the light breaking on us is not the gleam flashing through the gloom of the terrors seen at Eleusis, but the day-spring of the splendour sleeping on the heavenly hills. Hence did Eusebius say with truth, "The Hebrew nation alone enjoyed the privilege of the highest grade of initiation into the mysteries of the knowledge of God the Creator of all things, and of being instructed in the practice of true piety towards Him." And to our revelation from heaven may be applied the spirit of the words of the great tragic poet of Athens:

Happy is he whose reverential soul  
 These greater mysteries unfolded sees,  
 And through initiation fills his life  
 With sacred services of piety.\*

The full advantage springing from classical studies cannot be had without the Scriptures to ripen the views, and control the habits thus obtained. Therein is a verging towards truth which the wise men of the heathen sought, but never found.

\* Euripides, Bac. 73.

What Plato vainly endeavoured to unfold to his disciples on the promontory of Sunium, was made known to mankind by the great Teacher, whose discourse was heard with wonder on the Mount of Beatitudes. The truths of Scripture are the new continent in the domains of knowledge which the philosophers of antiquity, less successful than Columbus, were never able to find. The word of God has put us in possession of that which the greatest minds sought fruitlessly for ages. He who would confine his attention to classical literature without an effort or wish for adding thereto the wealth derivable from the Scriptures, is injuring his own interests in a way more foolish than the Chinese, who prefer the intellectual and material products of the Celestial Empire as more valuable by themselves than when are added thereto the wealth and learning flowing from the commerce of the world. If the truths of revelation were not discovered by the mind without divine aid, how mistaken to think we can start where they stop and add to them new discoveries of truths. Unsettled by the intoxication of a false philosophy, too many lose sight of the real nature of revelation, and use its truths as starting points for the mind in new speculations. They use the Scriptures as the tree of life was used by Satan when perching him there, not for its fruits, but for a vantage-ground in obtaining a better view; they climb far as these truths will lift, as to the tops of promontories whence to take their flight, like Daedalus with his waxen wings, over unknown seas. Divine truth made alive by the fires of the Spirit, sobers and refines while enlivening literature. It is the element which is needed for bringing out fully the beauty and benefit from profane literature, the flower, the fruit, the full development of that which lies wrapped in its bud, in the writings of pagan antiquity. To these bounds the mind is permitted to go in metaphysical and moral investigations. Every attempt at discovery beyond what is here revealed, by effort of philosophy, falsely so called, ends in airy nothings, or in finding realms as valueless as the Antarctic continent. The corrective of the pride of intellect showing itself in foolish

speculations, is the study of classical literature in union with the study of the Scriptures by head and heart combined. A mind thus trained, made steady and clarified by heavenly truth penetrating all our powers, not like the beams of the wintry sun on aicicles, but like the warmth of summer striking deep to the roots of vegetable life, can never be taken captive by transcendental imaginings, fine theories spun from the brain and thrown out to float in society an intellectual gossamer as flimsy as the threads across our path on an autumnal morning.

Flushed with vanity and the desire of novelty, the mind will dash into the skies and airy regions where such gross things as solid truth are unknown;—where clouds, and mists, and dimness, and all shadowy things are floating like Ossian's ghosts upon the wind, equally intangible and unsubstantial. When acting on the heart as well as mind, the Scriptures sober reason; and imparting a spirit of enterprise without rashness, make us sensible of the bounds to which genius using with skill the shades of language, may advance in refining the beautiful and investing it with attractive lines. The mind of Milton stored with learning drawn from sacred no less than classical studies, furnishes illustrations hereon in its magnificent creations of statues, and groups, and landscapes of solid literary gold. But unmindful of its just strength, unsteadied by the inspiration drawn from those living oracles, the mind tries to spin out theories for beautifying beauty, for sublimating thoughts more and more highly, till they pass off in gases which no eye can see, no receiver hold. Like a residuum, words are remaining in elemental shape, but are only used by fancy for exhaling sightless things which no alchemy can condense and make noticeable by the senses; spirits distilled from words the native strength of which has been destroyed by fermentation, empty ghosts of soulless epithets, the gaseous fumes of shadows, which are gravely set out in highly wrought jars and labelled by the inventor's hand—Wisdom etherealized—Quintessence of fancy—Proto-sublimate of thought. This wisdom claiming to transcend all other, even the wisdom of God, may, with the tem-

per of the king of Babylon prostituting the golden vessels of the sanctuary, use sacrilegiously the truths of Scripture, and look with contemptuous self-complacency on those feeling honour and safety in resting on the rock of revelation; yet on its forehead the boding hand seen by Belshazzar has written with the pen of inspiration, "Philosophy and vain deceit."

In considering the value of classical studies to the Christian and the minister, we shall dwell on their importance no further than as seen in a theological point of view. There are persons who think the time well nigh thrown away which is given to these pursuits, deeming nothing valuable to a preacher which does not bear directly on the forming of an exhortation or the delivery of a sermon. The need of habits of discrimination, reasoning, and correct logical thinking; of using precise, pure, and persuasive language no one can pretend to gainsay. But whence must come the ideas, the materials to be worked up in this logical process and imbedded in this convincing language? The fountain that beautifies a landscape and feeds the life of persons and things with its waters, is the mere outburst of unseen streams converging to that point from different quarters under ground and fed from many sources; the tree refreshing with its shade and sustaining by its fruits, spreads abroad its roots and supplies the boughs from which the fruit is gathered, with nourishment from sources unnoticed and unheeded. How foolish to pretend that in either case nothing is important but what is seen, the outbursting waters, the ripened fruit, to the exclusion of all those hidden springs without which there could be no gushing fountain, no fruit-laden boughs. The mouth of the righteous man is a well of life; the words of a man's mouth are as deep waters, and the well-spring of wisdom as a flowing brook; he whose delight is in the law of the Lord, shall be as a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season. The instructions of the preacher of the gospel, must be the concentrating and outpouring of wisdom drawn through the channels of various studies pursued apart from the eye of the

world; and the man who opens into his soul most of these channels will be, in the fullest sense, in the garden of the Lord, "a well of living waters and streams from Lebanon." Not only must the dew of the Holy Spirit rest on his branch, his root must be spread out by the waters of varied learning: then will he find his glory fresh in him and his bow renewed in his hand; then will men give ear and wait for him as the rain, and open their mouths wide as for the latter rain. The prince of orators teaches that the eloquence of an orator should be a precious extract elaborated by the mind, from a combination as far as possible of all kinds of learning; and the greater the compass of his knowledge, the more animating and vigorous his powers of persuasion. Much more is this true of him whose duty is to plead with men for their salvation. Paul, Augustine, Chrysostom, and Chalmers were men whose pleadings for Christ laid all things under contribution. Their public ministrations have become the admiration of the world, have been thus blessed, because they sowed beside all waters. To the well instructed ambassador of Christ a knowledge of the theological schemes of paganism must ever be essential for many reasons.

Without this, we cannot understand the evil from which the Christian religion was intended to deliver the world. What is the system which is held, preached, loved by us, which is called Christianity? A system of doctrine for regulating our conduct, and effecting our deliverance from sin. But is it confined to individuals? Has it not been intended for the redemption of the world? It is the constitution of the kingdom set up by God in opposition to the kingdom of darkness, for bringing all nations into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. It contemplates man, not isolated, but as the member of a great community now lying in guilt, from which is to be drawn by sanctification the host who shall through eternity inhabit the city of the living God. We meditate on the condition hereafter awaiting the Church, as one of holiness, as heaven. But what is the state from which the Church is delivered? That is seen in the world

under the effects of sin. How can we, therefore, know from what the Church has been redeemed, without acquaintance with mankind, not as they are in Christendom, where so many counteracting influences repress guilt, but as they appear in pagan countries, where every restraint is removed and sin brings forth fruit with more than tropical luxuriance. In classical literature is given a picture of the state of the world in the most cultivated nations at the time of Christ. Herein is laid open the philosophy, the history, the poetry, the morality, the worship of mankind, under the best aspect, at the juncture when God sent forth his Son.

Equally necessary is the information thus derived for showing how deeply mankind needed a divine revelation. This is an essential point in the argument on the evidences of Christianity. Paganism is revealed in the classic authors in its best development and most attractive attire, yet withal in the greatest moral deformity. As an exhibition of the stage at which man had arrived in his unaided efforts after a religion, it shows the hopelessness of human attempts to abate the tide of evils let in by sin on our fallen world. Therein the teachings and practices of the gospel are seen in advance of the condition of the world; and the point is laid open to which the mind had been able to rise in philosophy and religion without the aid of revelation.

Idolatry is the besetting sin of mankind. Far from being an outcast from Christian lands, it dwells here under another guise—casting aside the grossness of the garb worn among the heathen, and assuming one less repulsive by being modified and adapted to the habits of those with whom it sojourns. As idolatry sprung from the corruptions of human nature, and was the caricature first of Patriarchism, afterwards of Judaism, we must expect that under Christianity there would be the same unhallowed propensities of the heart at work, and there would arise a form of idolatry exhibiting a combination of Christianity with pagan errors, that in this would appear the operation of the old propensity for worshipping ancestors

and benefactors. Is this not so? Whence came the worship of the mother of Christ?—the worship of men canonized, the demons of Christian idolatry? How can the ministry be safely ignorant of the perfect form of that error which has ever been the besetting sin of the Jewish and the Christian Church? This is a vital point in theology, to be guarded by the sentinels of Zion with sleepless care. It is in the Church, in our struggle with the powers of darkness, what military men would call the key of our position. Hence, when the enemy was able to enter the camp of the saints, and seizing this point, intrench himself on the hills of Papal Rome, what havoc did he make of the Church; and what vigour is he able even yet to infuse into his attacks on spiritual religion. The struggle of grace in the heart is a continual struggle with this idolatrous tendency. Thus in the Church—thus in the world. How soon after Christ began the germination of the principles afterwards ripened into the Church of Rome; and how strong the tendency even yet in that direction. Idolatry is the religion of man as fallen. Christianity is the corrective, the antagonist power. It was introduced as the enemy of sin with its religion, idolatry. On every point, the two are irreconcilable. Between them there can be no fellowship: Christ is the head of the one; Belial the head of the other. Between these antagonist kingdoms, there is, and ever must be, a deadly struggle in every heart, no less than in the world.

Now, to neglect a knowledge of pagan idolatry, is for the soldier of Christ to disregard his adversary, and the arms, the tactics needed for success in the conflict. Napoleon said that nothing is to be neglected in war. The one thing overlooked may be the one thing needful for victory. Foreign missionaries have been made sensible of the importance of acquaintance with this subject. Henry Martyn found subtle adversaries in the Mohammedans; and the priests of paganism, however absurd their system to us, have artifice in its defence, and must be put to silence, not by contempt or ridicule, but by lawful argument and conclusive reasoning. The portraiture of

Rhesus by Euripides is true to nature. Coming to the Trojan camp, unacquainted with the enemy, he thought of nothing but victory; was ready to censure the delay in ending the war; and boasted how he would punish the audacious foe; yet, before the morrow's dawn, that enemy had been his destruction. Thus in defending the strong holds of the Church, in contending for the truth, those who feel there is no danger, who despise their antagonist, who neglect the exercises and armour needed for keeping in constant preparation for the foe, may be to the cause they love the most dangerous enemies.

There have been attacks made on Christianity, which cannot be resisted without a knowledge of pagan idolatry. It has been boldly maintained by array of learning and argument, that the institutions of Judaism were borrowed by Moses to a great extent from the Egyptians. If this be so, two results follow: Many important features of Christianity having come from Judaism, which is alleged to have borrowed from paganism, the Christian system is one not of pure revelation, but derived partly from the corrupt imaginings of man. Again, if Judaism borrowed from paganism, Christianity may do the same; and hence any ceremonies brought into the Church from the same source, are perfectly unexceptionable. This would unsettle our whole ground of confidence; for who will tell what has been thus borrowed, what not. Some of its most important truths and observances may have been thus derived; and how, therefore, can we know that by following this system we may please God. This is no unimportant question. It lies at the root of our faith. A proper acquaintance with pagan idolatry, shows the fallacy of this claim, demonstrates the dependence of paganism on revelation, and destroys at once all necessity for such volumes as those of Witsius and Spencer.

The history of error is interesting and important. This makes us acquainted with the phenomena of the intellectual and moral world, and furnishes the facts on which to build a sound philosophy. Profane history, including particularly idolatrous religions, is part of the history of the Church, not

the less truly because not generally so considered. The record of the different sects broken off from the true faith is every where thus viewed; yet the various divisions of paganism are sects that have separated from the people of God at a period more remote and are further gone in error. The difference between them and other errorists, is their retaining less of the truth, and having this trifle almost lost by transfusion in a greater mass of corruption. They show religious error in a state of more advanced development and maturity. The history of the nature and progress of idolatry in its principles and practices, in its views of God, and in the effect of those views on man, is one of the most important disclosures made and making in this world, and of absorbing interest to beings of an unfallen condition and higher sphere. In other worlds, themselves at present and ourselves hereafter may see more glorious displays of the laws of nature; but in no other world perhaps can they study the nature of sin as shown in the mournful facts here developed by the fall, and see the importance of observing rigidly the moral laws established for controlling the spiritual creation. And after these ravages of sin have been suppressed, the history of the workings of sin on earth will ever be read with the deepest interest and instruction by the inmates of heaven. With an interest infinitely surpassing that with which we listen to a person who has come safe through a dreadful pestilence, a momentous battle, a bloody revolution, will unfallen beings love to gather around the redeemed, and learn what they have here known, seen, felt of the revolting character of sin. In this view it matters not that so much of classical literature is fiction. Those very fictions are facts developed by the working of error in the human mind. And "the tale of Troy divine," even though unreal, a poetic fiction, is nevertheless a true picture of a condition of mankind in that heroic age. Fiction may embody and present principles with as much power and reality as can be done by facts. The statements of classic poetry may be unreal, yet the condition therein portrayed of human society

and of the heart of man in apostacy from God, is rigidly true; for a fundamental principle of the poet was to copy nature. In that view the poetry, tragedies, comedies, satires, philosophy, mythology, every fragment of pagan antiquity becomes valuable and precious as materials for the history of the depravity of the mind broken loose from the restraints imposed by the true knowledge of God. Were it not for the little got on this subject in their collegiate course, how many would be perfectly ignorant of the state of man without religion, and of the condition to which loss of the Scriptures would reduce even the most enlightened community. The wisdom clearly seen in all the arrangements of creation, seems to have ordained that the studies necessary for training the intellectual powers should be so blended with the heathen religions, that a good Christian education cannot be got without learning the condition of error, immorality, and abomination into which a departure from revealed truth inevitably leads.

Moreover, acquaintance with heathenism is necessary for understanding the nature of the foundation on which Christianity rests. Man is prompted and bound by duty to look into the laws and arrangements of God in the scheme of redemption, no less than in creation. Through sin, limits have been set on every side to our knowledge; yet while giving us facts and truths in revelation, God left something to be done by us in following out those truths so far as sober reason, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, may lead. A disposition to clear away as far as possible the rubbish around the tower of salvation and look into the character of its foundation, is a different thing from the pride which would bring revelation to the test of reason. The Christian system has not been the growth of an age. Its corner-stone was laid in the first promise at the gate of Eden; the foundation was carried up during the Patriarchal and Levitical dispensations; the finish was put to the structure when among men appeared the Son of God. Days and months of labour were required for rearing the lofty pillar to the memory of Washington in Baltimore,

that the whole might be crowned with the statue on its summit: Christ is to the structure of revelation, what that statue is to the monument; and while without him revelation would be without its essential crown, the intelligent admirer and lover of Jesus will delight to scan the whole fabric and examine reverently the massive foundation on which rests this glorious manifestation of God in the person of his Son.

But this foundation was laid amidst heathen idolatry. A beginning had been made, but the work seemed at a stand, and almost obscured, when a new start was given by the calling of Abraham, and the structure was carried on surrounded by the abominations of Egypt. The New Testament is founded on the Old, and cannot be understood without a knowledge of the latter. Nor can a thorough acquaintance be had with the Old Testament without an exploration of the soil in which its basis was laid, the religious systems, the idolatry of this apostate world. The kind of foundation laid for any edifice must depend on the character of the position, and be different in different places. Thus the genius of the Mosaic economy cannot be fully understood without viewing it in connection with the surrounding idolatry. Egypt was then the best representative of heathenism, powerful in wealth, in arms, in civilization, and in refinement of its false religion. There, was the kingdom of God as an organized community, brought for the first time into collision with the kingdom of darkness, and the conflict begun which shall close only with the end of the world. Not without being studied in connexion with the idolatry then and thereafter girdling them, can the reasons for many things embodied in the Jewish ritual be properly comprehended.

The same is true concerning the structure of Christianity. Its foundation in the Mosaic economy and its perfection in the gospel were both built, like the second temple, in the midst of enemies, where it was necessary to work with the trowel in one hand and the sword in the other. Both came into action opposed to the most powerful combinations of idola-

try ever existing, those of Egypt, of Greece, and of Rome. These must be known for understanding and appreciating the character of the Christian religion. The wisdom and genius shown in the Eddystone light-house cannot be known without viewing the element amid which it is placed and the fury of the surges it has to withstand. The Church "the pillar and ground of the truth," towers amid the flood of ungodliness bursting over the world, its foundation on the Rock of ages, on its top burning the undecaying light of divine truth for guiding and saving from destruction the tempest-beaten souls of our wrecked and benighted race. The wisdom of its structure and the strength by which it has withstood so many fearful commotions, such terrific storms, cannot be known without studying the elements amid which it stands and with which it was formed to contend.

To the Christian, especially him who is entrusted with the defence and exposition of the truth, there is, therefore, necessity for acquaintance with pagan idolatry. So important has this been deemed by God, that he has so arranged things in his providence, as to make it impossible for us to study the models given by him of intellectual excellence and pass through the discipline of a thorough education, without getting some knowledge of this subject. The divorcing of classical studies from the study of the Scriptures is neither desirable nor possible. Like Egypt, Sabæa, Lebanon, and Tyre furnishing materials and gold for God's house as set up in the wilderness and afterwards established on Mount Moriah, in whose inmost shrine were hid the tables of the written law—profane literature, uninspired learning, science, pagan idolatry, must be laid under contribution in rearing the fabric of a finished Christian education, and all these materials be built into a structure wherein the truths of the Scriptures must be enshrined.