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OCTOBER 13, 1853.

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INAUGURAL ADDRESS,

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OCTOBER 13, 1853,

BY

EDWARD P. HUMPHREY, D. D.



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DISCOURSE.

The department of instruction, which I am required to sustain in our Theological Seminary, is styled the Professorship of Biblical and Ecclesiastical History. The distinction taken between these two branches of learning rests, I presume, on the sources from which they spring. Biblical History, is derived from the sacred Scriptures; Ecclesiastical History is derived from uninspired historical documents. The former records the development of the church of God in the two dispensations, the Patriarchal and the Levitical, through which it has passed; the latter describes its progress during that under which we live, the ministration of the Spirit. The two, taken together, comprehend the whole history of the church since the world began.

It were difficult to prescribe limits to the inquiries falling into this department. The time through which Church History runs is now six thousand years. The territory over which it ranges is the whole habitable globe. It weaves into its narrative every important incident which has occurred in the career of nearly two hundred generations. The societies, whose affairs it investigates, are all the kingdoms of remote antiquity; the great monarchies of central and eastern Asia; the two empires of the early christian era; the Mohammedan dynasty; all the modern dominions, imperial and republican; and in brief, every historical race which has flourished on earth. This branch of history connects itself, also, with the philosophies which have, from time to time, established themselves in the convictions of mankind, with the various sciences

which have been pursued, with the manners and customs which have prevailed, with all the occupations of men, even agriculture, navigation, and the arts; and with whatever has, at any period, or in any land lent a charm to the worship of God in its purity or its corruptions, even poetry, eloquence, music, painting, and statuary. And, further yet, since this history is a record of God's Providence over that which involves at once his eternal glory, and our eternal welfare, it identifies itself with his far-reaching purposes, his immutable will, his adatable perfections, and his almighty power. To explore this vast field of inquiry, and to conduct the researches therein, of our candidates for the ministry, is the work set before me. I will say nothing more of its difficulty nor of my insufficiency for it. The only apology, which I can offer to myself or to my fellow men for adventuring on so high an enterprise, is the profound conviction that I am providentially shut up thereunto; and accordingly, I am here, at the appointed time and place, ready to attempt what is required of me, humbly invoking the divine blessing and the indulgence of my brethren in the Lord.

It will be proper, perhaps, on this occasion, to consider, with some care, the proper method of church history. Since, however, each branch of the science requires a method adapted to its own nature and the sources from which it is derived, and since it would not be right to trespass on your patience with a discussion of the subject in both of its parts, I purpose to limit this discourse to the method of Ecclesiastical, as distinguished from Biblical History. Now the method for which we are to seek will be determined by the views we take of this history, in the first place, as to the matter of it; next, as to the form in which its materials will be most useful to the preacher; and lastly, as to the intellectual states which should be brought to the study. To these three particulars, therefore, I shall reduce all that I have to say.

It is a fundamental idea, that History, as to the matter of it, is a collection of facts. Neither philosophy, nor doctrine, nor theory, nor hypothesis, but fact is the subject matter of this de-

partment. It does, indeed, involve a strict inquiry into the causes and effects and relations of events; it admits of speculation and discussion, and the largest discourse of reason looking before and after; it investigates philosophy, systematic theology, political science, and even the useful and ornamental arts; yet its essential characteristic elements consist in what has been spoken, done and suffered, as touching the church of God. It does not, as its primary object, inquire what is true in religion, but what progress that truth has made in the world. It will not settle the doctrine of the trinity, but it will inform us what Arius and Athanasius taught respecting it, and through what controversy in the schools of Alexandria, and in the council hall at Nice, and through what over-ruling Providences in the world, the faith of the church in the Lord Jesus, as God manifest in the flesh, was conclusively established. Nor will our science discuss the question whether the prelacy exists in the church, by right divine; but it will describe the origin and progress of that wide spread delusion. Nor does it determine whether the primacy of Peter, and his pretended successors at Rome, is laid either in the Scriptures or in the constitution of the church, as that is divinely revealed, but it traces the historical development of that usurpation of God's prerogatives and that despotism over man's conscience, at once a blasphemy and a conspiracy. It is therefore a fundamental idea in this department that we are to deal with facts—*facta*—things done; to trace the course of events; to ascertain what man has attempted to do, and what God has enabled or permitted him to accomplish in the progress of the church.

This idea indicates the surpassing value of the Acts and Epistles of the Apostles, as text books in this department. Considered as historical documents, merely, the information which they communicate is of the highest importance. They relate the planting of the Christian church and its history, for the first thirty-five years of its existence. The wonderful out-pouring of the Holy Ghost, sealing our dispensation, as the ministration of the Spirit, is described. The doctrines preached on that

occasion, together with the directions given by the apostles to those who asked what they should do to be saved, are recorded. These books, moreover, inform us into the gradual development of the church state on earth; the principles which enter into its fundamental law; its interior organization; its relation to the secular power; its officers; its councils; the duties of its presbyters ruling and teaching; and the prerogatives of its members. And yet more, these writings put upon the primitive church its true aspect as a missionary society, expressly commissioned and required to preach the gospel to every creature; supplied with miraculous powers; armed with forces divine; and striving to the very uttermost to fulfil its great offices.

But the historical value of these writings lies, also, in their authenticity. We may rely on the books themselves as genuine, their text having been neither mutilated nor interpolated, and upon their statements as unquestionably true. It is remarkable what obscurity rests on the history of the primitive church, so soon as we leave the sphere of light supplied by the scriptures. We have, it is true, what purport to be the writings of five authors, styled the Apostolical Fathers, who are said to have been the immediate disciples of the Apostles. But of all the works ascribed to Clement of Rome, only one is generally accepted as genuine, and the text of that seems to have been corrupted. Fifteen epistles are attributed to Ignatius. Eight of these are spurious, and of the remaining seven, one is doubtful and the others have been grossly interpolated. A single epistle only bears the name of Polycarp, and the genuineness of that is disputed by high authority. The composition ascribed to Barnabas may be genuine, but is of little historical value; while the production of Hermas consists of imaginary and wearisome dialogue between celestial spirits, suggesting the alternative doubt whether it was forged in the name of Hermas, or whether Hermas himself was insane. In comparison with these spurious and mutilated, or if genuine, almost worthless documents, the Acts and writings of the Apostles assume a transcendent importance. We are sure of

them as genuine in all their pages, and authentic in all their statements. Their truthfulness was insured by divine inspiration; and the purity of their text has been secured by God's eternal Providence.

Assuming then, that the true idea of history, as to the matter of it, is a collection of facts, it seems indispensable that these should be reduced to some scientific order. Otherwise it were impossible, either to grasp the immense mass of material that has been accumulating during the course of centuries, or to subject that material to any practical uses. Mosheim, deservedly called the Father of modern Church History, assumes, as periods, the successive centuries of the christian era. Dividing the history of each century into two parts, he treats in one, the external, and in the other, the internal relations of the church. He disposes the external history into two chapters; in the first, recording the prosperous, and in the second, the adverse events of the church. To the internal relation of the subject he devotes, usually, five chapters; exhibiting the history of learning and science; of teachers and government; of theology; of rites and ceremonies; of heresies and scisms. The chief advantages of this method are accuracy and fulness of dates; complete catalogues of distinguished persons arranged contemporaneously; and the facility which it affords of surveying the entire condition of the church at particular periods: showing, for example, the relation, from century to century, between its doctrines, its forms of worship, its government, its spiritual life, and its spread or limitation in the world. It may, however, be objected to this arrangement, that the continuity of important events, some of which fall into one century, and others, into the succeeding period, is disturbed in the narrative. And, further, the arrangement itself wholly breaks down at the period of the Reformation, when the doctrines which had been condemned as heretical, were discovered to be divinely revealed, and when what was styled the church was found to be Antichrist. This change of position assumed by the whole subject, throws Mosheim's plan into confusion, indicating that the plan itself is radically defective. It is

proposed, therefore, by more modern scholars, to adjust the chronological divisions not to centuries, but to some grand epochs in the development of the subject. Gieseler, for example, proposes four periods. The first, to the time of Constantine, the development of the church under external oppression ; the second, till the beginning of the image controversies, the development of the church as the prevailing religion of the state ; the third, till the Reformation, the development of the Papacy prevailing over the state ; and the fourth, the development of Protestantism.

The student having adopted this, or some similar arrangement, and having thoroughly acquainted himself with the historical facts belonging to the several periods assumed, will be prepared to recast these materials into such forms as will contribute most to his professional advantage. This is the second particular involved in our general topic. It is the design of our Seminary, to educate men not for the pursuits of the chronologist, or the political or the religious philosopher, but for the ministry of the gospel. A thorough preparation for the work requires the candidate to comprehend the historical development of the church in all its relations. He should, therefore, pursue the subject after what may be called the topical method. The highest place should be given to the history of christian doctrine. He might well follow the arrangement adopted in our confession of faith, and trace out the history of each doctrine in its several branches, through all the controversies and corruptions and reformations which have prevailed. This work accomplished, the student should then acquaint himself, systematically, with the history of christian worship, through all the stages of ritualism, until its return to the primeval simplicity in which we, this day, serve the God of our fathers. Next the history of church government, should be traced from the presbytery of the Apostolical age through the presidency, prelacy, and papacy, until its reformation into its free and scriptural form. And, still further, the manifestations of the inner life of the church, its relations to the state, and its extension among the nations, should all be attentively considered.

We may be able, possibly, both to explain and recommend this method by two or three illustrations drawn from what has just been termed the highest branch of the science, the history of christian doctrine. The influence of philosophy on the dogmatic faith of the church shall furnish one of the proposed illustrations. We may take for an example, the doctrine concerning Christ, as it was affected by the Gnostic Philosophy. Now it is necessary to state that this philosophy proceeded as to one of its branches from an inquiry into the perplexed question of the origin of evil. It took its departure from the proposition, as a first truth, that the Divine Being was in no degree, not even the most remote, connected with the origin of sin. It denied that he even permitted its existence. But as it was impossible to doubt the fact of evil, some source must be assigned to it. This philosophy solved the problem by assuming that sin and all evils are properties of matter. But did not God create all things? The answer was, that matter is eternal. The inherent pravity and eternity of matter were, therefore, fundamental ideas in this philosophy. One irresistible conclusion from these premises was, that the God of the Jews, having been occupied in the construction of the world out of matter, was a wicked spirit. By another deduction, equally direct, the humanity of Christ was denied; for matter being inherently malignant, the incarnation of Christ would have constituted him a sinner. Accordingly, for many hundred years, one of the most wide-spread delusions, which ever afflicted the church, was the absolute denial that Christ came in the flesh. It was held that what seemed to be his body was a mere image—a phantom, an incorporeal vision. From this it followed that he did not, in reality, suffer death; and, still further, that he made no atonement for sin; and further yet, that the resurrection of his body, and of his saints, is a mere delusion. So fruitful in religious errors was this philosophy, that it was not until Gnosticism itself became obsolete that the errors were extirpated.

Another peculiarity of this system may be mentioned. In order to place the Divine Being at an immeasurable distance

from contact with matter, it was maintained that he reigned in spotless purity, in remote and inaccessible glory. From him it was taught, spiritual beings emanated partaking largely of his nature, but inferior to him. These emanations, or *Æons*, as they were styled, gave existence to others, yet inferior to the first; and so on in a long succession, each series or generation of *Æons* gradually degenerating. At last, widening out from the original uncreated centre and fountain of life, as circles widen upon the agitated waters of the lake, they passed the boundaries of the *Pleroma*, or the dwelling place of God, and came in contact with matter. One step further brings us face to face with Arianism. When Arius divulged his doctrine of Christ, as existing indeed from before the foundation of the world, but yet inferior to God and a creature of his power, he found a philosophy current which was ready to adopt his hypothesis. This philosophy, engrafting christianity upon itself, proclaimed Christ as one of its Emanations, or *Æons*, related more nearly or remotely to the Absolute God, according to whims of each particular inquirer. The false philosophy was wide spread in the convictions of mankind; and in it the error took deep root and filled the earth. The great Athanasius began his resistance to Arianism, by repudiating the Gnosticism, out of which it sprang. The controversy was settled as to the church, at the council of Nice; but the error itself did not cease out of the world until the philosophy was exploded. The heresy of the *Docetæ*, who denied the humanity of Christ, and the heresy of Arius, who denied his divinity, were the direct out-births of the Gnostic philosophy. They flourished and they perished together. Other delusions touching the same subject have prevailed and do yet afflict the souls of men, such as Sabellianism and Socinianism. But Arianism and Docetism, properly so called, have been obsolete with Gnosticism for nearly fourteen hundred years.

Whether this philosophy was prevalent in the age of the Apostles, may admit of a doubt. Without entering upon that question, we may presume at least that some of its fundamental ideas, were at that time obscurely working themselves out

in the minds of men. If this be so, then we can appreciate the reason, which led the Apostle Paul to lay such stress upon his warnings against "profane and vain babblings and oppositions of science falsely so called;" "philosophy and vain deceit;" "vain words;" "the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness whereby they lie in wait to deceive." And if we may assume that the Apostle John detected, in his last days, the germs of the heresy which taught that the body of Christ was not real flesh and blood, but a phantom only, then his language takes the form of a prophecy as well as a warning: "Hereby know ye the spirit of God: every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ *is come in the flesh* is of God: and every spirit that confesseth *not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh*, is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist whereof ye have heard, that it should come; and *even now already it is in the world.*"

The method of history now recommended, will also enable the student to trace the gradual but progressive settlement of our system of doctrine. It has been proposed, as is well known, to arrange under four grand divisions, the whole scheme of revealed religion. The first is theology, strictly so called, or the doctrine concerning God, his attributes, his mode of existence in trinity and in unity, the relations of the several persons in the Godhead to each other, the eternal generation of the Son, the procession of the Spirit, and whatever else falls into this general head. Now it is a remarkable circumstance that the controversies of the first three centuries of the christian era, related almost exclusively to this subject. The vastest stores of learning, the utmost wealth of genius and polemic skill were exhausted in that great contention. At last the council of Nice, having been summoned for the purpose, determined, for all time to come, the faith of the true catholic and universal church touching the divinity and humanity of Christ. We may adopt the maxim of the stern old Puritan, that "the decree of a general council hath just so much force, as there is force in the reason of it." Yet so much force is there in the reason of the Nicene creed, that not only has the

doctrine affirmed been accepted by the whole church of God, but no important change has been made in the mode of stating the doctrine, from the fourth century, the period of the council, to the seventeenth, the period of the Westminster Assembly. And now in the last half of the nineteenth century, we are here to lay the foundation of a school which shall teach the same doctrine, in almost the same terms. For fifteen hundred years, the faith of Athanasius and his compeers concerning the Son of God, has been the settled faith of the church. It has been often assailed, but never shaken. It has been denied ; just as the inspiration of the scriptures has been disputed. But in each instance he who disputes the faith of the church takes his place, as to that, with the infidel. Within the church the question was settled, ages ago for all the ages to come, until the Lord Jesus shall himself appear to vindicate, by the brightness of his coming, the testimony of all his faithful servants.

Another department of divine knowledge contemplates the truth respecting man. It includes the whole christian doctrine of sin, original and actual ; the guilt of the first man's first sin ; the imputation thereof to his posterity ; man's actual condition as a sinner, the immedicable disease and the irremediable ruin of human nature ; and all the topics of religious inquiry which spring from these germinant centers. This department it is proposed to call anthropology. Now historical theology informs us, that about the time when the doctrine concerning Christ was settled, the one concerning man was taken under public discussion. This is not the place to report the great debate between Augustine and Pelagius and their several parties. But in the course of one hundred years the question was settled, partly by the authoritative decree of the council of Carthage condemning Pelagianism, but chiefly by the spirit of God enlightening his people into the knowledge of the truth. The testimony of the divine word was thoroughly sifted, the doctrine established by it ascertained, that doctrine reduced to sharply defined propositions, these propositions traced to their logical conclusions, and then those conclusions no less that the

propositions from which they were drawn, tried by the infallible word. Now we greatly err, when we treat the main questions touching sin in such manner as to indicate that we ourselves regard them as debatable and unsettled ; and as if the truth now depended on our own skill in expounding the scriptures. It is not so. The decisive battle was fought many hundred years since. Then the victory was won. Then the issue was determined for all ages. Our modern controversies are but rehearsals of the original strife ; as if the battle of Marston Moor should be repeated by a few regiments of holiday troops, for the amusement of the people, or for their own improvement in military strategy. We should manage this controversy, whenever it is thrust upon us, with the lofty spirit of men who contend for what has belonged, from time immemorial, to them and to their fathers ; and not in the hesitating temper of him who is striving to gain possession of a territory long and honestly disputed. If we carry the day over our adversaries, let us not be unduly exalted ; for we have only fought over an old battle, with well tried weapons, on a vantage ground, where it has been won a hundred times. If we seem, in the estimation of the bystanders, to be defeated, let us take courage again, as we remember that we have lost only an inconsequential skirmish, or at most that it is the advocate and not the truth that has been beaten. The truth was long ago established on foundations, as immovable as the mountains that are about Jerusalem.

The third division of sacred science treats of the way of salvation. The debate here lies between those who maintain the doctrine of justification by faith alone, and those who contend for the idea of justification by the sacraments ; which is the point at issue betwixt Romanism and Christianity. In historical theology, we say that this point was conclusively settled at the period of the Reformation. The violent controversies, which sprung up at that time, did not turn, in any degree, on the mode of the divine existence, nor on the sinful character of man, nor on the condemnation that rests upon him by reason of sin, nor upon the nature of sin itself. Another issue was

joined ; and this was, precisely, the doctrine of justification. The Protestants held that man was justified by faith alone. The Romanists taught that this justification is by the sacraments rightly received ; rightly administered by a priesthood duly ordained ; that ordination being in the succession of the Roman Church. The infinite debates of that era, and the immense libraries of polemic theology created then, are reducible, as to their subject matter, to this single doctrine of justification, its meritorious ground, the methods of its communication to men, and its effects. The whole subject was settled, finally, at that time, and the Protestant doctrine of justification is, just as clearly and essentially, an article of the true church as the idea of the divine existence.

The last of these four great heads of christian doctrine, is in a position of greater uncertainty. This relates to the church, its nature and attributes, its marks and notes, its constitution, officers, powers, prerogatives and whatever pertains thereto. These are subjects of present inquiry and discussion. The faith of the people of God is quite unsettled as to several of these particulars. Indeed, the question, what is the church ? divides the opinions of eminent men in every denomination. It is certain that there is not an agreement in even our own communion upon questions which go to the very core of the subject. Some of our most learned divines, for example, maintain the validity of Popish baptism, teaching not only that this is christian baptism, but that the Romish establishment is a part of the visible church of Christ. It may appear singular that brethren who are agreed in holding, as of faith, that the Pope is Anti-Christ, should yet differ as to whether the body of which he is the head, and to which his headship is claimed to be essential, is any part of Christ's church ; and as to whether its sacraments are Christ's ordinances. Such, nevertheless, is the divided state of sentiment among us ; and it may serve to show that the doctrine of the church is not yet conclusively settled. In this particular, historical theology can do no more than report the progress of the discussion to the present time, and then clearly state the questions that are still at

issue. But, as we have seen, the higher truths of revelation, those which relate to the Blessed God our Saviour, the lost estate of man, and the way of salvation, are unchangeably established. It is the province of ecclesiastical history to trace out, step by step, the processes through which these great results have been reached.

The method now under reflection, will likewise exhibit to the student, the history of our doctrinal standards. Historical theology reveals, most clearly, the fact that our confession and catechism owe their excellencies not to the divines assembled at Westminster, nor to their contemporaries, but to the labors of many generations of men, mighty in the scriptures. The light was on one day created and it shone, with rays diffused, in the newly made firmament and over all the earth and waters, and on another day those scattered beams were assembled, in the burning orbit of the sun. In like manner the truths of the gospel were slowly wrought out, one by one, and then, at last, gathered upon the luminous pages of our confession. The real history of this document, is the history of the church itself. Let us find an example of what we mean in the Christology of our standards. After two centuries of debate, it was determined in the Nicene council that, according to the scriptures, the Lord Jesus was divine and that he was incarnate and became man. Thus these two capital points were settled. Then it was asked whether a human soul formed a necessary part of the humanity of Christ. Apollinaris, a celebrated bishop of Laodicea taught that the higher reason of man could be of no use to him, in whom the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily. Through the labors of Athanasius and his compeers it became the received doctrine of the church that Christ possessed a perfect human nature including a rational soul. The Westminster divines simply adopted the result of this discussion into that answer of the two catchisms which ascribes to Christ "a reasonable soul." In the following century, Nestorius, patriarch of Constantinople, uttered the opinion, that in Christ there were two distinct persons as well as two distinct natures. Cyrill, patriarch of

Alexandria maintained the contrary opinion, and Nestorius was condemned in the council of Ephesus. Now we find the traces of this famous controversy in the chapter of our confession which affirms that the two distinct and perfect natures of Christ "were inseparately joined together." A few years afterwards, by a reaction from Nestorianism, a powerful party arose which maintained that the two natures of Christ were blended into one, the divine having absorbed the human. This error was condemned in the council of Calcedon; and it furnished to our confession, the idea that the two natures were united in Christ "without conversion, composition or confusion." Then the Monophysites raised the question whether Christ possessed a corruptible or incorruptible body, bequeathing to our standards the doctrine that Christ "took a true body, with all the essential properties and common infirmities thereof." Thus, gradually, and one by one, the truths revealed in the word of God respecting the person of the Redeemer, were discovered by learned men, laboring from age to age in the work, until nothing remained to be done, but to combine into a single comprehensive chapter all these discovered and established ideas. What is true of this head of doctrine is true of all. Point by point, doctrine by doctrine, conclusion by conclusion was wrought out in the lapse of centuries, until the materials were prepared for their final adjustment into one complete confession of the faith of the church. No long debates were needful in the Westminster Assembly. These had been heard and finished at Nice, Carthage, Ephesus, Calcedon, Constantinople and Antioch. The timbers and stones of Solomon's temple were hewn in the distant mountains; so that there was neither hammer nor axe, nor any tool of iron heard in the house, while it was building. The truths of the Bible had been thoroughly elaborated in other lands and in other councils of the church. It was needful only to determine the relations of some of the few doctrines, to reduce a few of them to exact and intelligible terms, and then to adjust them all into a single document. No strife of tongues or war of words could find place in such a deliberation.

This method of history, moreover, reveals the origin of the terminology employed in our standards. A memorable incident in the Nicene council, as related by Maimbourg, may serve as an illustration of this statement. That body gave much attention, not only to the doctrine that was to be affirmed, but to the terms in which it should be stated. The Arian party were willing to adopt a creed affirming that the Word was God and of God, and the perfect image of the Father ; because these expressions might apply in some sense to man, and so could be explained in their favor, while they could also be received by the orthodox. The council perceiving the evasion, sought out some new expression which would admit of no equivocation whatever. At last it was remembered that a letter of one of the Arian party contained these words: "If we say that the Son of God is uncreated, from that itself we confess that he is CONSUBSTANTIAL (HOMOIOUSION) with the Father." The council seized upon the word "consubstantial" to express their own meaning; for the term, by the consent of the Arians themselves, admitted of no double sense, but conveyed unequivocally this idea and none other, that the Son was of the same substance with the Father. The Arians resisted to the utmost, the use of the term. They proposed subsequently, to compromise on the word Homoiousion, "similar in substance." But the orthodox were immovable. They perceived that the resistance made to the use of the former term fixed, more unalterably, its precise signification, and vindicated the wisdom of adhering to it, while the expression proposed as a substitute abandoned the truth: for Christ is not similar, but the same in substance, with the Father. Mr. Gibbon derides "the furious contests which the difference of a single diphthong excited between the Homoiousians and Homoiousians." The remark may fulfil the conditions of a sneer, but for the reason of the case he might as well have added that all the conflicts between Christ and Antichrist are reducible to a single preposition. The original word, however, was resolutely adhered to; it passed into nearly all the orthodox creeds of succeeding centuries; and the Westminster Assembly did not hesitate to

employ its equivalent phrase, "the same in substance," to express one of the most subtle but important ideas in the doctrine of Christ. The pages of ecclesiastical history are full of such illustrations. The student cannot fail to perceive how intimately the true doctrine is identified with the terms in which it is conveyed. It is a conclusion, long ago foregone, that if you would retain your ancient faith you must cleave also to your ancient nomenclature. If you mean to defend every one of your doctrines, you must not give up any one of your terms. The apostle himself counsels us to "hold fast the form of sound words." In theology words are things. Here the gem goes with the setting, the painting with the canvass, the statue with the costume. We may not exalt a word above a truth; neither may we forget that "a word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver."

The method of history now proposed exhibits the comprehensiveness of our symbols of faith, as compared with the preceding christian documents. The most venerable of the ancient creeds, however admirable as statements of particular doctrines are yet palpably deficient in completeness. So far from exhausting the science of theology, they do not profess to touch some of its most important heads. The apostle's creed, so called, is included among our standards. Yet this celebrated formulary, although containing little else than the doctrine concerning Christ, makes no allusion not even the most remote to the atonement by his death, nor to justification by faith in his finished righteousness. History, in explanation of this circumstance, informs us, that at the time when this creed was framed, there was no controversy in the church touching justification or the atonement. All debate turned then on the questions, whether Christ had a real body; whether he was actually born, crucified, and slain. Accordingly the creed contains, in its brief compass, no less than five statements predicated of his humanity. Although adapted to its particular design and most orthodox as to the matter then in dispute, it is yet far from being complete as a symbol for all ages. It is simply absurd to affirm that it contains all that is

essential in the faith of the church. It was intended, by its framers, for no such purpose, but to meet existing and flagrant errors. The same is true of the creeds of Nice and Constantinople, the Athenasian creed, those of Irenæus, Tertullian, Origen and the Apostolical constitutions. In a less degree, the documents of modern dates, such as the Lambeth Articles, the XXXIX articles, and the judgment of the Synod of Dort are liable to the same criticism. They are, to their own extent, most excellent and scriptural. But they do not contain explicit and unequivocal statements of certain doctrines; or they omit entirely some important heads of theology. But the Westminster standards survey the entire field of divine revelation, and aim at giving the whole mind of the Spirit touching the whole faith of the church.

I will indicate another point of view from which the history of christian doctrine casts light upon our confession. It is an armory stocked with weapons for the defence of the truth. He who has not attended minutely to the subject cannot appreciate the polemic skill with which our faith is stated. Every conceivable objection is anticipated, and its force is broken by some word or clause. Every old controversy into which the truth has been drawn is remembered and provision is made against the day of its renewal. Upon abstruse and recondite topics such as free-will, predestination and the divine decrees, the supposed sense of the Word is unequivocally and boldly stated; yet the statement is surrounded with guards and walls like a defended city. He who would espouse its cause should see to it that he make no incautious statement of the doctrine or any part of it at variance with the standards. He who would assail it, must consider well his objections and enquire whether those objections have not been completely forestalled by the terms in which the doctrine is conveyed or by some limitation imposed upon them. Let him who is in the city not depart out of it; and let him who would take it by force, first go round about it, tell the towers thereof and mark well its bulwarks. Those old walls were built in troublous times. They went up in the presence of hosts of enemies. Of those who labored

at them, the half wrought in the work, and the other half of them held both the spears and the shields. The defences were all proved as they were built, and they are not to be easily overthrown. If at any time, therefore, one of our brethren have occasion to engage in controversy with our adversaries, whoever they may be, Popish, Prelatical, Armenian, Antinomian or Socinian, let him state his propositions in the language of our formularies ; let him take up his positions on the ground staked out for him there, and he will be astonished to behold what walls of strength rise up around him and what mighty weapons are put into his hands. The definition of the church contained in the twenty-fifth chapter of our confession, pulls down into the dust the whole huge and gorgeous temple of Popery, as effectually as the Hebrew giant demolished the temple of Dagon when he bowed himself upon its pillars. He who will begin his labors in the Popish controversy—in some of its phases the great controversy of the day—by planting himself upon that simple description of the church, if he will resolutely adhere to it and fight out the whole battle on that vantage ground, may defy the whole hierarchy on earth from Oxford to Rome. These articles of faith, these definitions and distinctions and limitations and explanations remind us of a collection of ancient British armor. This is the cuirass in which Richard defeated the Saladin and rescued the holy city from the infidel. That shield, battered but not broken, was borne in the battle of Banockburn. That spear did good service at Flodden Field ; and this broad-sword clove through helmet and mail at Cressy and Halidon Hill. We may safely trust this spiritual armor of ours, if indeed we have the strength to bear it into the field. It girds the limbs with irresistible might. It realizes the sentiment of the sacred lyric ;

“ These weapons of our holy war
Of what almighty force they are.”

It were easy to indicate at still greater length the instruction to be gathered from the history of theology. The relations between doctrine and modes of worship are shown historically in the circumstance that the evangelical system resting on the

idea of justification by faith, has been uniformly associated with simple and scriptural forms of worship ; but the opposite system, resting on the idea of justification by the sacraments, has ever established for its disciples the worship of pomp and sense. The worship of the Kirk springs from the theology of Westminster, and the ritual of Rome from the theology of Trent. The relations between the doctrine and the government of the church are equally intimate. The evangelical system as an historical fact, has identified itself with a free church government ; while sacramentalism in doctrine shows an elective affinity for Popery in discipline. Not less striking is the connection between the dogmatic faith of the church and its inner spiritual life, on the one hand, and its missionary undertakings on the other. From all these particulars, we might derive illustrations of both the nature and advantages of the topical method of ecclesiastical history.

But the limits prescribed to this discourse require me to proceed without delay to its concluding topic. Now some of the intellectual states appropriate to this department of knowledge, are indicated by the circumstance already mentioned, that history as to the matter of it, is a collection of facts. The student should therefore, discipline his mind, in the first place to the love of the truth ; and next, to all the processes of thought, inquiry and analysis, which enter into the idea of a severe induction. He should make himself acquainted with the vereties of the subject. To this end he should investigate its sources with the ardor of the advocate and the sobriety of the judge. Heedless of all consequences as to the bearing of his researches on his own cherished opinions, or on those of others, he should seek for the truth, by ascending to its higher head-springs. He should approach the final results of his inquiries with cautious, patient thought, remembering that he is seeking for that which when found is to be believed ; and he that believeth should not make haste. When at last, he has reached the truth, let him gaze with faith as well as wonder on its unveiled majesty ; let him receive its dictates with a fixed and absolute conviction ; and then let him act on that conviction with an unwavering

steadfastness ; knowing this, that belief in the simple uncorrupted truth is ever more the law of the spirit of life.

Still further, it is indispensable, that the student in history enter into a true sympathy, a living communion with the periods which he investigates. A great biblical scholar has said, that he who would interpret the prophets in the Old Testament and the Apocalypse in the New Testament must steep himself in Orientalism. In like manner if we would comprehend the past we must allow it to enter into our spheres of thought, living its peculiar life, assuming its own antiquated forms, and robed in its now faded garments. We have spoken of the council of Nice. We may not content ourselves with the chronology of that assembly, the names of its most celebrated members, the Greek text of its creed and of its decrees. We must endeavor to reproduce the whole scene as it passed over its generation.

The Roman Empire, of the age of Constantine, must reestablish itself in our consciousness. We must surround ourselves both with the tokens of its grandeur, and with the signs of its rapid decline, which have been accumulating for the space of three hundred years. Then a greater empire than that of Rome, the kingdom of Christ on earth, must display to us its insignia. It has passed through its period of primeval purity, at once the victim of remorseless persecution, and the medium of a divine and saving power ; it has won possession of the world, but it is falling into degeneracy and is nearly ready to mount the imperial throne. Herod in mockery put the purple robe upon the Saviour ; now Constantine is about to put that robe in honor upon the church. But in each instance the purple is the prelude of a crucifixion ; first that of the master, then that of his cause. We must survey also, the great christian capitals, Jerusalem, Alexandria, Antioch, Carthage and Rome, visit their episcopal palaces, and observe the painful contrast between the carnal pomp of the hierarchs and the humility of the fishermen of Galilee, of whom these pretended to be the successors. But in the ranks of the inferior clergy we shall find here and there one like the youthful Athanasius,

in whom are revived not a few of the apostolical virtues. The image of the emperor Constantine also will rise before us ; his majestic person, his graceful mein, his courage, his vigorous understanding, his resolute will, together with his pride, voluptuousness and prodigality—his character, the natural product of an era, in which were strangely mingled the elements of barbarism and christian civilization. The prevailing philosophy of the day must likewise be investigated in its origin, dogmas and practical tendencies ; and we must see how this philosophy lay compacted beneath all the turbulent waters of religious and political excitement, and furnished a holding ground in which the errors of the Arians and the Docetæ could firmly anchor.

We must witness the assembling of the council at Nice. Let that ancient city rise from its ruins ; Let the beautiful plains of Bythinia assume their pristine beauty ; and the neighboring lake reflect again the walls of the imperial palace. Three hundred and eighteen bishops with the most learned of their inferior clergy, together with a multitude of others, assembled in the early summer of the year 325. They came from the most distant parts of the empire. The historian saw in the council a reproduction of Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, when devout men were gathered from every nation under heaven. Syrians and Cilicians were there, together with Phœnicians, Arabians, Thebans and Libyans, Persians and Scythians. Pontus, Galatia, and Pamphylia, Capadocia, Asia and Phrygia furnished their most distinguished prelates. They brought with them strange costumes and discordant tongues, but a true faith, also, in the divinity of the Lord Jesus. Among them were not only the most celebrated bishops of the day, but the patriarchs from Antioch, Alexandria and Jerusalem. There were present also not a few of the noble army of confessors. Some were there who afterwards entered through martyrdom into the joy of the Lord. Others present were always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in their bodies. A venerable servant of Christ was there from Egypt, one of whose eyes

had been plucked out in the persecution of Maximian. Another had lost, in that persecution, a left arm and a right eye. One went thither from the banks of the Euphrates, whose hands had been branded with hot irons ; and another from Cyprus, who had suffered the fury of the tyrant in the loss of an eye and a leg. These and many others were there, whose wounds were in testimony that they counted it all joy to enter halt and maimed into life eternal.

We should, as far as possible, reproduce the debates in council. On the one side was the subtle and equivocating Arius. On the other Athanasius, then only a youth in age and a deacon in office, filled the whole council with admiration for the eloquence and learning with which he vindicated the truth. At length the day arrived when the questions at issue were to be determined in the presence of the emperor. He entered the hall preceded by a procession of courtiers and the sound of the trumpet. He wore the Roman purple, the imperial mantle, the sash of silk embroidered with gold and sparkling with diamonds. The assembled Fathers rose to their feet ; for he seemed, says Eusebius, like "some heavenly messenger of God." His chair was placed lower than the rest as a token of honor to the church ; but it was made of gold and set by itself in the upper end of the hall, to show what was due to his royal dignity. He would not sit down until desired to do so by the council in deference to its ecclesiastical authority ; but he sat down first and then commanded the Bishops to be seated to signify withal that he was their master. The ceremonies proceeded. The patriarch of Antioch made an elaborate oration. The emperor replied speaking in Latin to sustain the dignity of the empire, and commanding a secretary to read his address in Greek for the satisfaction of the assembly. Then they came to the final decision ; and the Lord Jesus was declared by acclamations of above three hundred bishops to be the Son of God, "God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God." The emperor heard their judgment with great joy, and instantly ordered Arius to be banished and the Bishops who refused to unite in his condemnation, to be

deposed. Then followed public prayers for the emperor, and after them public games, banquets, combats and diversions. The council was closed with a banquet in the imperial palace, and not one of the Bishops excused himself on account either of his age or the austerity of his life. They passed through ranks of guards, entered the royal apartments, were entertained by the emperor himself at sumptuous tables, and departed laden with magnificent presents. We may sympathise with the exultation of the Fathers when they exchanged the dangers of Maximian for the palace of Constantine. We may even excuse the bishop of Caserea who saw in this strange and incongruous scene a lively image of Christ's kingdom. But he who first enters into the spirit of true religion and then contemplates this spectacle, will see in it a medley of light and darkness, representing most faithfully an age which was the product at once of the primeval but declining purity and power of christianity and of the corruption and pride of lingering barbarism. A love for the truth was mingled with the spirit of the world. The Cross was set side by side with the Labarum. A military chief, who had not even humbled himself to receive christian baptism, was invited to settle the faith of the disciples in the Son of God. Solemn prayers preceded the old pagan games. An imperial revel celebrated the adoption of a holy creed.

With what gratitude to God do we turn from this imposing, but mournful spectacle, to that which is now passing before us ! We have a true gospel, a pure church and a free commonwealth. Here are the sacred scriptures. Here is our confession of faith, summing up the labors of God's people, through all past ages, in the interpretation of his Word. Here is the assembly of his saints, in the midst of which we honor the Son even as we honor the Father. And here is a venerable Synod of the church, a council composed not of prelates and patriarchs after the commandments of men, but of teaching and ruling Presbyters according to the ordinance of God. Its records are adorned by the names of Rice, and Campbell, and Nelson, and Cameron, and Blythe, and Blackburn, and Wilson—men

mighty in the scriptures, full of faith and of the Holy Ghost. Herein is that saying true, one soweth and another reapeth. Other men labored and we have entered into their labors. And here and now, we accomplish at last, the desire of their hearts, and finish the work of their hands, while we lay in the bosom of this Synod, the foundations of a school of sacred learning.

Now, therefore arise, O LORD GOD, into thy resting place, thou, and the ark of thy strength ; let thy priests, O LORD GOD, be clothed with salvation, and let thy saints rejoice in goodness !