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I. AUTHORITY IN REVELATION AND MORALS.

FIVE FALLACIES AND ONE FIASCO CONVERGENT.

CURRENT literature, popular addresses and constantly recurring conversations in social intercourse, discover six convergent influences actively at work in society. Four are newer; two older. The aim of each is to shift the basis of authority in moral and religious life. The six forces differ widely in nature and in the character of those who direct the propagation and transmission of them through society. But, without collusion and moving along different, and sometimes antagonistic, lines, they tend to the same result, the annihilation of finality and authority in ethics and revelation. The convergence implies the superintendence of the same evil personality, shrewdly intruding himself into these different spheres of life and giving a common direction to their movements.

1. Blatant last century infidelity holds that miracles cannot be proven by testimony, and that, therefore, the claims of Christianity cannot be established because resting on them. It denies the relevancy or pertinency of what are called the evidences of Christianity, and in regard to Scripture would say: granted that a revelation has been made, it cannot be authenticated. It scoffs at religion as a superstition, and sneers at authoritative morals as the silly scruples of childhood and inexperience—greenness. Its ethics are utilitarian only. The best that it can say is, moral principles must be obeyed, because it is for the good of society. The evil of such a system was shown long ago in the famous passage about balances when held in the hands of self.—*David Hume, his confrères and followers.*

intrinsic immortality of the soul," that the author of the Bampton Lectures on "The Jesus of the Evangelists" and of the "Handbook of Christian Evidences" is most open to adverse criticism both as a logician and as a theologian.

The author first palpably begs the question by asserting point-blank that every determinism in form is nothing but another name for fatalism, being only a phase of the theory which reduces man to the condition of a machine or of an animal. Later on there is some pretence of reasoning out this proposition, but the process is only of the specious but frivolous sort which is based on the erroneous averments that have become so threadbare. Dr. Row is apparently a Pelagian, certainly a Restorationist, and possibly a Socinian. The unfathomable mystery of the origin of sin is dealt with in a manner as debonair and egotistical as it is superficial. It is manifest that the final theodicy has not yet been given to the world by Dr. Row. Our amiable, if oversanguine, author boldly takes the ground that "the existence" and "presence of moral evil" is one of the inevitable corollaries from the admitted existence of a moral system. This is, of course, the old, old delusion of the essential impreventibility of sin. The preacher of St. Paul's Cathedral also openly favors the scheme of posthumous probation. He urges impressively enough that God's work of repair traverses, not only innumerable peopled worlds, but innumerable progressive ages. The acme of absurdity is, however, reached when he surmises that some of the "many mansions" of the invisible universe may be "mansions of purification"! A friend near us suggests that in that great house not made with hands there must be "spiritual bath-rooms"! We part from our entertaining, but in some cardinal points, sadly untrustworthy mentor with a genuine respect for his moderation of temper, his talents, his exploits, and his good intentions; and with a clear recognition of the fact that his most serious departures from orthodoxy are no doubt due to the sinister fascination of the brilliant scholar, and audacious rhetorician and orator, who still preaches at St. Margaret's and Westminster Abbey.

H. C. ALEXANDER.

STEARNS' EVIDENCE OF CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE.

THE EVIDENCE OF CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE: *By Lewis French Stearns*, Professor of Christian Theology in Bangor Theological Seminary: Pp. 473. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1890.

This handsome treatise consists of a series of lectures given by Professor Stearns, of Bangor, Me., on the Ely foundation in Union Seminary, New York city. With a great theme, an able thinker, a ripe scholar, and a fine writer, we are prepared to find these lectures of much interest and great practical value. After reading them, we are better able to understand why Union Seminary called Professor Stearns to succeed Dr. Shedd, in its chair of Theology, and why Bangor Seminary should rejoice that Dr. Stearns did not accept the call. A more stimulating book we have not read for some time. If enthusiasm for his theme sometimes leads him to what we must consider one-sided views, yet the warm glow of that enthusiasm, coming from a heart burning with devotion to the glorified Redeemer, at once stimulates the mind and refreshes the heart. The course consists of ten compact and scholarly lectures. The following *résumé* of them may give our readers some idea of what they contain, though it can do them but scanty justice.

In the first lecture our author sets forth what may be termed the *status* of the Evidences at the present day, and defines carefully his theme—The Evidence of Christian Experience.

The refutation of the deism of the last century, at the hands of Butler, Paley and others, is well described, though it is perhaps going too far to allow that the methods of Butler are not effective for the apologetic needs of the present day. With fine skill, our author shows how subtle pantheism has taken the place of deism and how scientific progress has led to agnosticism and materialism. Following a hint given by Ebrard, in his *Apologetics*, he says that the present situation calls for a system of Apologetics which shall be "a positive system of proofs adapted to all times and circumstances, by which we may not only meet attacks, but forestall them and carry them into the enemy's country." (P. 19.) He thinks, too, that progress has been made in this direction in recent years. He is convinced that a truer perception of what Christianity is has been attained, and a more profound view of its defences has now been reached. We rejoice with him that such is the case. "Christianity," he says, "is the whole redemptive activity of God in Christ. It is God in Christ reconciling the world unto himself." (P. 20.) It will be observed that this definition describes only what may be called the subjective or dynamic aspect of Christianity. This, of course, is every word of it true; yet, unless the objective or formal gospel scheme be at the same time clearly pre-supposed, the definition is at least one-sided.

That our author makes this pre-supposition is evident, as he approaches his theme, when he draws the distinction between: (1). The saving grace connected historically with a series of redemptive facts culminating in the advent of Christ, and: (2). The divine truth represented by the doctrines of revelation. (Pp. 23-24.) He also makes the somewhat popular modern distinction, signalized by Professor Mead, in his *Supernatural Revelation*, between the facts and doctrines of revelation and the *record* of them. The redemptive revelation is one thing, but its record in the Bible is another thing. In a qualified sense, there may be ground for this distinction, but great care must be taken not to push it too far. The Bible is not a merely human record of a divine redemptive revelation. The record is divine as well as the revelation. For while many things contained in the Bible were not at first divine revelations to those who wrote them, yet, as this so-called record of a divine revelation comes to us, stamped as divine and infallible by the fact of inspiration, may it not, by men of the present day, be regarded in all its parts as a divine revelation? Thus even the history and poetry of the Bible are different from all other history and poetry; and the divine revelation and its divine record are for us of the present age practically identical.

Our author rightly looks upon Christianity not merely as a redemptive revelation completed nearly two thousand years ago, but also as a system of redemptive agencies brought into the world to stay, so that Christianity is a living reality in all the ages. He deserves much credit for giving this point prominence.

Then in defining his subject our author classifies the evidences from the standpoint above indicated in a threefold way, as historical, rational and redemptive. Christianity is historically true, it is philosophically sound, and it is a working power in the world to-day. The last is the sphere in which the evidence of Christian experience lies. By this evidence Dr. Stearns does not mean the general ar-

gument from the effects of Christianity, nor that from its present influence upon men, nor even that drawn from the *outwardly* changed lives of its professors, but rather that which is "derived from the manifestation to the believer himself, in his own inward spiritual life, of the presence and power of God and the Christian realities," P. 28. There is a definiteness and clearness in the manner in which our author marks out his subject worthy of all praise.

The second and third lectures deal with the theistic and anthropological presuppositions upon which the evidence of Christian experience, and in fact the whole fabric of Christianity, rest. Both of these lectures are exceedingly able, and on the whole satisfactory. That on the theistic discussion is specially fine, revealing at every turn at once the philosopher and the theologian, but there are some things in the anthropological exposition which in our judgment might have been stated with a little more care. See page 75.

The fourth lecture deals with the genesis of the evidence. It begins "when a man comes fairly under the redeeming activity of God in Christ." "*The initiative is known as coming from God*" (italics his), in what is described as the "divine call." P. 112. This call has "an external and internal aspect." Of the external the outward word and the witnessing church are the means. The internal aspect of the divine call consists in "an immediate and personal communication of God to the soul as the God of redemption," and this in a "crisis of the inner life." P. 119. This brings the man to the threshold of the Christian experience in question, but the actual experience is only attained by the free act of the human will accepting the gospel, which act, however, is only possible by divine grace. P. 126. This act of the soul has two factors—repentance and faith. Repentance is *choice* and faith is *volition*, and they are inseparable. Faith is the first executive act of the will issuing from the choice implied in repentance, and it consists in receiving and resting upon Christ alone for salvation. Further, repentance differs from penitence. The former is a matter of the will, the latter belongs to the sensibility. Faith, too, is not mere mental assent, nor is it simply a belief in the unseen, nor again is it a conviction of the reality of axiomatic truth; rather "is it an act of trust by which we yield to God's will, and accept Christ as he is offered to us in the gospel." This faith, further, "is instrumental and appropriates God's grace." "It is receptive rather than productive." It results in the "conscious experience of the revelation of a new life to the soul." This new experience testifies to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and this Spirit bears witness to the fact of union with Christ, of God's fatherly relation, of the forgiveness of sins, of the communion of saints, and of final blessedness. P. 127-130.

There is much fine analysis in this lecture of which the above summary gives no proper idea, and in it there is much which is to our liking. Did space permit, we would like to make some remarks on the philosophy of the will implied, and on the theology of repentance and faith involved, in our author's analysis. Omitting such remarks, there is a statement made on page 114 which in itself puzzles us, and which does not seem to be made plain by the context. In speaking of the relation between the general religious experience of all men, including heathen who have never heard of Christ, and the peculiar experience of the Christian, he says: "It seems to me not unreasonable to suppose not only that in some instances the germ of divine life may exist in heathen hearts (that, I hope, is often the case),

but also that it may arrive at a certain degree of maturity in this life, though, of course, it could never be what it might have been under consciously recognized Christian influences." . . . "Nor should we expect to see such a person" (a heathen who had never heard of Christ) "make any high attainments in the religious life as judged by the Christian standard. In a word, his experience would not be, in any adequate sense of the term, a Christian experience." Here we are puzzled and prompted to ask several questions. Is this "germ of divine life" such as shall result in salvation? If not sufficiently mature in this life to secure salvation, shall it go on unto maturity and bring salvation in some stage beyond death? Is this germ ever implanted in any adult soul who has never heard of Christ? Does not the teaching of Scripture seem to be that in the case of adults a knowledge of the objective gospel is necessary to those subjective experiences that are really Christian, wherein the germ of divine life results in salvation? On such very delicate ground our author, it seems to us, would have been wise to have written more cautiously.

In the fifth lecture, the growth of the evidence is described. Here the advancing growth of sanctification is considered, and the way in which this growth furnishes an increasing knowledge of the reality of the divine causes at work is ably sketched. Then the trinitarian nature of this experience as it relates to the Father, to the Christ, and to the Holy Spirit is outlined. All along the progress of sanctification there comes increasing inward assurance of the truth of Christianity. The force of the evidence runs side by side with this growth.

In the sixth lecture, this evidence is verified in a discussion which, though marked by ability, seems at times to be somewhat forced and unreal. The author here raises the question, "Is the evidence of Christian experience capable of scientific or philosophical verification?" This question is answered in the affirmative, and he then goes on to show that, by a definitely scientific method, our probable knowledge of the truth of Christianity, based on the outward evidences, is transformed into real knowledge by the experiment of accepting the gospel offer. Until this Christian experience begins, a man can have only a probable knowledge of Christianity, but after he has responded by faith to the divine call, this probable knowledge is changed into real or certain knowledge which supplies the highest kind of evidence in favor of Christianity.

This is a brief statement of what is wrought out at length in this lecture. It is a rather technical sketch of the argument from the experience of the power of the gospel in a man's soul. For the man who is its subject, it is overpowering, but for others without this experience, it can have no greater force than any other good evidence based on testimony.

The seventh lecture, in order further to confirm the scientific nature of this evidence, considers certain philosophical objections. Eight objections are taken up and disposed of in a most effective manner. The objection raised by the positivist, agnostic and materialist against the possibility of this experience is most thoroughly refuted. The objection that the Bible determines Christian experience, and so that experience cannot be taken to prove the truth of the Bible, seems to give our author most difficulty from his point of view.

The eighth lecture deals with a number of theological objections, some from the opponents of evangelical truth, and some from its friends. Here the systems of

Kant, Ritschl and Schleiermacher are discussed with fine discrimination, and real ability. Yet some would hesitate to agree with all he says in regard to the services rendered by the last named to Christianity.

Towards the close of this lecture, a point of some importance is touched upon: That is, the distinction between the evidence of Christian experience and that derived from the testimony of the Holy Spirit. Our author says that they are to be carefully distinguished, and yet he seems to be in some confusion at this point. If the Holy Spirit be the agency in the divine call and in the work of sanctification, which provide the very conditions under which the evidence of Christian experience comes into existence, it is not easy to see in what respect they are essentially distinct. If this experience witnesses to the truth of Christianity, it also certainly testifies to the divine causes which underlie it. Our author seems to admit this in Lecture V. Pp. 166-170. It is, perhaps, best not to push distinctions so far as our author does in making the discrimination above noted. In a genuine Christian experience the agency of the Divine Spirit, and the results of that agency in the soul, are surely so blended that it is not wise to attempt to distinguish them. It is, perhaps, of more importance to make sure that the experience is determined by the outward Word, as well as produced by the inward Spirit, and at the same time to consider carefully whether the experience is capable of being interpreted by the Word.

The remaining lectures discuss at length the relation of the evidence of Christian experience to the other evidences of Christianity. Throughout, our author argues forcibly for giving this evidence a supreme place in the organism of Christian proofs. "It is the vital member of this organism." "It is the keystone of the arch of the evidences" (P. 311.) He indicates the relation of a Christian man and of one who is not a Christian to this evidence, and ventures the statement that the latter, so long as he remains outside of the sphere of the Christian realities, cannot have complete proof of the truth of Christianity. His only way to obtain it is to become a Christian. This unqualified statement may be questioned, for it seems to us that a man who is fully convinced of the truth of Christianity on intellectual grounds, may reject it for reasons which are moral in their nature. At the same time, all must admit that in order to know the full power of the truth of Christianity, it is necessary to experience its divine power in the soul.

Our author first considers the evidence of Christian experience in its relation to the historical evidences for the authenticity, genuineness, credibility and inspiration of the Scriptures. Much that is sound and good is here stated, yet it seems to us that some undue concessions are made to advanced modern criticism, on pp. 320-321. Next the relation of this evidence to the miracle is considered. It is insisted that the argument from miracles must be reconstructed. Accordingly, the miracle is to be regarded not so much as an attestation of [a divine revelation, as a part of the revelation itself. We are not fully prepared to give our approval to this view, which puts the evidential function of the miracle in a secondary place. That the miracle, as one phase of the manifestation of the supernatural, is a part of divine revelation so far as its causality is concerned may be admitted, yet the way in which the Scriptures, and our Lord himself therein, set forth the purpose of the miracle compels us to give the evidential element a foremost place in the doctrine of the miracle, as it comes before us in the Bible. The relation of this evidence to proph-

ecy is not discussed at any length, but its relation to the person and work of Christ is more fully treated. A stronger doctrinal basis would have rendered this discussion more satisfactory.

The exposition of the relation of this evidence to the rational and practical branches of the Christian evidence concludes the discussion. Here the antecedent probability of a divine revelation, the reasonableness and inherent excellence of Christianity, the adequacy of the Christian philosophy of existence, the outcome of the study of comparative religion, and the benign effects of Christianity on the world, are expounded to good purpose. It must be confessed, however, that the relation of these branches of evidence to that of Christian experience does not always seem to be very clearly brought out.

Some interesting notes, and a useful index, complete the volume, which, in its mechanical make up, leaves nothing to be desired.

We have taken up so much space with the exposition of the important contents of this able treatise that only a few concluding remarks can be made:

1. Taken as a whole, this course of lectures is one of marked ability, and has many fine features. It does not ignore metaphysics, nor make any side-thrusts at systematic theology. It is keenly alive to the recent movements of modern religious thought; and it is marked throughout by a calm, judicial temper, sometimes absent in such writings. We can earnestly commend it as a book worthy of careful study, even where hearty agreement with its positions is not possible.

2. Dr. Stearns has rendered excellent service to apologetics in this treatise, in insisting on the importance of the evidence of Christian experience at the present time. While this branch of evidence is not new, for Owen and Baxter, as well as other writers, have dwelt upon it, still the time is opportune to have a restatement of the argument in this excellent form. And while, perhaps, our author claims too much for this evidence, when he gives it the place of supremacy, there can be no doubt that it is the culminating point of all the evidences. As already hinted, it is irresistible for the individual who has it; but our author does not seem fully to appreciate the fact that, for those without it, other evidences may be of prime importance in clearing the way.

3. Having indicated that there is so much of value in these lectures, we may be pardoned for pointing out what strikes us as a serious defect in them. A lecture on the doctrinal or theological presuppositions, following these excellent lectures on the theistic and anthropological presuppositions, would have given our author substantial aid in his subsequent expositions. If the doctrinal outlines of the objective gospel, setting forth the leading contents of the scheme of redemptive truth, had been given in a separate lecture, much would have been gained. Our conviction is that between the doctrines and the experiences there is constant correlation; and the experiences are to be framed according to, as well as understood by, the doctrines. Few men are better qualified than Dr. Stearns to have done this, in addition to the excellent work he has done in these lectures. But we thank him most sincerely for these lectures, which have been perused with pleasure, and which have served to stimulate us so much.

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