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THE BEARING OF HISTORICAL STUDIES ON THE RELIGIOUS USE OF THE BIBLE

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The Bible is better understood by scholars today than ever before, but it seems to be at the same time less generally used and less enjoyed, and it is natural to ask whether there is a connection between the increasing knowledge of the book by specialists and the lessening familiarity with it and regard for it among the people. The problem thus suggested is not an isolated one. In regard to other books it may be asked whether the advance of learning is accompanied by a gain or a loss in the capacity to read with enjoyment and uplift; and in regard to other facts than those recorded in the Bible the question is in place whether scientific study stimulates or dulls the sense of their poetic beauty or spiritual value. Yet the problem is peculiarly pressing in regard to the Bible and the facts it records, because of the unique significance of these books and of this history for our higher life.

It has been the first duty of historical students to defend the intellectual necessity and to maintain the scientific character of their work against both the unconscious influence and the outspoken opposition of tradition and prejudice. Certainly theological preconceptions and perhaps even religious interests required to be silenced in order that facts, literary and historical, might be seen as they were, and allowed to speak for themselves. But when his freedom has been fully won, the historical student will naturally hope that his work may prove helpful to religion, at least that it will not create obstacles to faith. He will hope

that religious faith will be able to appropriate and put to its own higher uses such results of scientific study as are commonly accepted and secure, and at the same time that it will not wait for or depend upon results that must in the nature of the case remain uncertain. He will want the right understanding of the book to spread among the people, but he will not want the average man to imagine that the Bible belongs to scholars and that to the unlearned it is a closed book.

If science and religion could go each its own free way in the use of the Bible, neither interfering with the other, the problem proposed by our theme would be easily solved. In fact such independence may fairly be claimed so far at least as it is involved in the assertion that the religious spirit and the reasoning intellect are two normal factors in the higher life of man, two interests and faculties of the mind, each equally deserving our trust and requiring satisfaction. Yet the adjustment of these two faculties of our nature to each other is not quite a matter of course. A division of material between them cannot be carried through. It cannot be said that science has to do with things seen, religion with things unseen. The aim of science is knowledge, that of religion is communion with God. Whatever has reality we must seek to understand, to find its place in the one order of the universe; but at the same time all things real, though in different ways and measures, must become to us revelations of God, ways of approach to him. Religion itself may properly be an object of scientific study; science itself may inspire religious feeling. Still less than a division of material between science and religion should we undertake or permit a division among ourselves between men of science and men of religion. That one man should pursue the scientific study of the Bible and another put it to its religious uses is not the way in which the independence of science and religion in this region is to be secured. We may believe that since both the scientific and the religious interests belong to us by nature they should not interfere with each other and cannot in the end harm each other; but this does not mean that they may not unduly and dangerously limit each other's claim to the attention and energy of the individual man. It is not well for one to be only an historical

student of a literature which is fitted to stir the emotions and quicken the imagination and determine the will. The danger which we have now to fear is not that the results of scientific study will disprove and prohibit a religious view of the world, but that science will prove too absorbing a pursuit and produce in us satisfaction in understanding, as if that were our highest power, and the atrophy of our faculties of imagination and feeling. We have an eager desire for knowledge, regardless of uses and consequences. This is the characteristic higher life of our time. Below this is the still more current desire to put our new knowledge to new uses, to make it contribute to our power and enjoyment. Pleasure in knowledge and pleasure through knowledge are the higher and lower sides of that mental life which is most characteristic of our age. But, if we can trust the testimony of the greatest human spirits, there are pleasures greater than those of knowledge. Now the higher appeal of literature is of course to the imagination and the heart, not to the intellect. It is especially in literature, therefore, that scientific studies are in danger of being pursued at the expense of higher uses and enjoyments; and this danger besets the students of the Bible no less than the students of other great books.

Practically, then, the scientific study and the religious use of the Bible, dealing as they do with the same material and claiming the interest and the energy of the same minds, cannot be kept independent, but will interact upon each other. Our problem is to discover what that interaction actually is, and ought normally to be. It is at once evident that it is not the same in all parts of the book. The Bible contains a great variety of elements, differing widely in their historical character and interest, and in the kind and degree of their religious power. It may be said—not forgetting that such a classification has uneven and overlapping edges, and sometimes applies to different aspects rather than to different parts of the book—that in some parts of the Bible historical studies practically exclude the religious use; that in some parts, on the other hand, they leave the religious use quite unchanged; that in some parts, again, history yields results that are positively helpful to faith; and that in some cases religion may give aid to history, may add the needed human

meaning and value to the bare facts which history brings to light, or even supply the clew to their true explanation.

I. There are, then, in the first place the cases in which historical interpretation practically excludes the religious use of the Bible. The Song of Solomon is secular, not religious poetry, and can no longer be put to religious uses now that an allegorizing interpretation of it is no longer possible. There are in the New Testament arguments which rest on a literalistic or on an allegorical use of the Old Testament, which we can no longer follow with any other than an historical interest, even though we may sympathize with the end which the writer reaches by this to us impassable road. There are, especially in the Old Testament, ceremonial rites, moral ideals and motives, and intellectual conceptions for which we cannot make room in our view of the world,—customs, ideas, and ideals to which we feel that we have done full justice when we have traced their origin and put them in their place in the development of human thought. In such cases historical study satisfies us, and leaves us disinclined to attempt any present spiritual appropriation of what belongs so completely to the past. There will be differences of opinion as to how far and at what points the historical account has this right to take the place of any other use of Biblical conceptions. Most modern men would agree that in regard to the accounts of first things and last things, the descriptions of heaven and of sheol, of angels and of demons, we need nothing but an historical account and explanation, and by this are freed from any further responsibility. To most of us this is only a part of that emancipation which science has achieved from superstitions which have enslaved the human mind, not only in ancient times but almost until our own generation.

There are perhaps some who would answer the question suggested by our theme in no other way than this. Science, they would say, removes the quality of supernaturalness from the Bible and so makes an end of its religious use. To this it can fairly be replied that the Bible shows its remarkable quality in the slight relative degree to which its religious value has been lessened by a science which has fundamentally altered our conception of nature and the supernatural. There are sacred books

whose sacredness vanishes in the light of science. If our Bible were composed chiefly of ritual laws, or of miraculous legends, or of apocalyptic visions, the rise of historical criticism would have involved the end of its religious value. The growth of science has had much more effect upon the later doctrines of the Christian church than upon the Bible, because the Bible contains so little that is of the nature of science, and has so little concern for the communication of knowledge.

II. There are, in the second place, parts and aspects of the Bible of which it can be said that historical studies have substantially no influence upon their religious use. It is of course a superficial judgment that hastens to declare that this is everywhere the case, and that the book remains after historical criticism just what it was before. It is at once clear that this definition of the bearing of historical studies on the higher uses of the Bible applies to it so far as its qualities and effects are of the literary sort. The Book of Psalms presents the clearest instance of a Biblical book of which the religious value is little affected by historical studies. Historical problems are here, of course, in abundance; problems of time and occasion, of authorship and composition, of original and later uses and interpretations. Such problems are difficult enough to excite the zest of the historical explorer and to make the search in itself a pleasure. They are as a matter of fact the more difficult because they are the less important; for the absence of historical data is largely due to the fact that these poems are not closely connected with historical events, but move in a region that is above time and place. After historical criticism has done its utmost, the Psalms remain what they were before. The book continues to be a book of prayer and of song for all peoples; and the true appreciation of songs and prayers is reserved for those who sing and pray.

What is true of the Psalms is true of all the parts of the Bible of which the quality and effect are of the same sort; books or parts of books which are made and meant to be enjoyed rather than to give information, to inspire rather than to instruct. There are many parts of the Bible of which the greater value lies in the beauty, the passion, the uplifting power of their expression of religious faith and hope and love. In many parts of the pro-

phetical books, pre-eminently in Deutero-Isaiah, this is the case. In regard to many of the stories in the Pentateuch and the historical books it is beyond dispute that the greater value to the spirit of man lies upon the surface of the narratives, not in the obscurities of tradition below, and the still greater obscurities of historical fact. The stories as they are can be enjoyed by children, and still, in even fuller measure, by mature men and women, enjoyed in a degree determined by the reader's humanity, not by his learning. But this does not bring us by any means to the limits of the region within which such simple literary appreciation is the higher use of the Bible. We must include parts of the letters of Paul, larger parts than we should at first suppose. The writings of Paul have been so long used as books of theological science, and are now so eagerly and fruitfully searched as documents of historical science, that they have hardly been allowed to reveal, except to the unlearned, their true nature. They are books of passion more than books of reasoning; and so far as they are books of passion they remain for religious uses much the same after historical criticism as before. After the work of scholarship, Paul will still, as before, be best read and most truly appreciated by those who most nearly share his experience, those to whom the power to call God, Father, and Jesus, Lord, and the experience of divine love as an indwelling Spirit make the soul glow with gratitude and lift it up to an exultant consciousness of freedom and of essential immortality.

Of many of the stories and sayings of the gospels it is no less true that their proper character is that of poetry. By no means all that Jesus said was new and comes to us as information. Jesus had a marvellous power not only to sift the wheat from the chaff in the moral ideals and religious faiths of his people, but to give to what he approved memorable expression, and to send old truths as well as new in forms of moving beauty and convincing illustration down to the common people and forth into the world. Many of his words in the gospels have this character. Their effect does not even depend on the certainty that he uttered them. They are self-evidencing, and speak to us with the direct authority of conscience itself.

Our religious use and enjoyment of such language, whether in

the Psalms or in the letters of Paul, in Genesis or Isaiah or the gospels, does not depend altogether on the degree in which we actually share the conceptions, or even appreciate the situation of the writers. It belongs to the nature of the language of emotion that it adapts itself to varying moods and adjusts itself to new conditions, and that the power it exerts is in a measure independent of the reader's understanding of its original sense. In the Book of Psalms the Jewish church preserved and used songs of which the original meaning and the point of view reflected in them had already been left far behind. Of these outgrown meanings the Jewish readers were quite unaware. Quite unconsciously they adapted the words to their own views, yet they used them truly in accordance with their deeper character. We ourselves use the Psalms with still different ideas in our minds, involuntarily giving a poetic value to words of which the original sense is not possible to us. We do this easily in the case of the Psalms, and there can be no doubt that in the reading of Paul also we are nearer to that communion of soul in which true reading consists when we feel the heart of his emotion than when we turn upon his language the light of contemporary conceptions. It is beyond doubt one of the disadvantages of our scientific training and habit of thought that the world of facts and ideas imposes itself upon us as a thing of greater reality than the world of imagination and feeling. It is hard for us, in spite of the argument and appeal of every great literary critic from Aristotle to Coleridge and Wordsworth and Arnold, to confess that poetic truth has no less validity and much more value than historic fact; hard therefore to admit that to enjoy a book is a greater thing than to understand it, and brings into play higher faculties of the mind.

There are then important parts of the Bible in which historical study has little bearing upon religious use, in which indeed our chief anxiety should be lest it bear too hard, lest the scientific interests crowd the religious out of that first place which rightly belongs to it. These parts are all such as offer their greater worth as it were upon their surface, in their quality as books, to the sympathetic and responsive soul; such as do not hide their greater treasure beneath the surface in the region of historical fact.

III. But let us at once confess that there are parts of the Bible of which the greater value lies not on the surface but below it, to be unearthed and brought to light only by historical research. These are the parts which fall under our third division, those in which historical study helps us to a better religious use of the book. The help that the historical study of the Bible offers to religion is both negative and positive, and, if it prove to be more negative than positive, this will not mean that it is not needed and great. Historical study compels us to make, and enables us to make intelligently and with conscious purpose, certain discriminations in the book which have the effect of removing obstacles to our enjoyment of it and imparting freedom in our use of it. The fact that there are many things in the book that are not in agreement with our knowledge of nature, or with our moral ideals, or with our conceptions of God, can no longer perplex us or drive us to allegorizing, when we recognize an historical development in which the imperfect has its place, either as crude beginnings, or as evidence of a decline from higher to lower levels. Historical science points out a reasonable way in which we may make such discriminations in our religious reading of the Bible as religious people have always made, though often in a capricious and ill-considered way. Historical science has made it easier for us to follow Coleridge's counsel than it was for Coleridge himself, to find for ourselves in the Bible that which finds us, to give freely the greater value to that which finds us at the greater depths of our nature. To be sure, the bondage from which, whether we will or not, historical study sets us free has never been so great as to prevent spiritual profit and satisfaction in the reading of the book. The things in it to which the religious soul responds with joy are too many and great to be lost behind the things that offend. Yet the offence becomes greater as the scientific spirit prevails and our uneasiness or even rebellion under the yoke of bondage to the letter increases.

There are subtler distinctions also which historical studies help us make. The difference of which we have become so conscious between our own scientific and religious interests enables us to grasp with greater clearness the difference between intellectual forms of conception in the Bible itself and the sub-

stance of religious experience, between what we might call the scientific element in these writings and the religious. The facts as to the history of thought have a right to guide, even though they do not compel, our judgments as to the value of the intellectual conceptions in which religious experience has from time to time, in one mind and another, sought to find expression and explanation. We have here only an instance of the function which scholarship has to perform in preparing the way for the higher uses of great books in general. That it has such a function, even though only a preparatory one, is especially evident in the case of foreign and ancient literatures. For the appreciation of such books we need in some way to bridge the chasm that separates us from the writers and their times. Historical studies are often important in order that we may become more properly contemporary with the book we would enjoy. We must understand and sympathize with the writer's ideas, though we cannot make them our own, thinking for the time as he thought in order that we may feel as he felt; yet never forgetting that the abiding value belongs to his feelings rather than to his thoughts. To understand the ideas of the Biblical writers, so to understand them that we are free from the sense of bondage to them, is to many of us a prime condition of the discrimination between the human and temporary and the eternal and divine elements in the book; and historical studies are for us the straightest and surest path to such understanding and freedom.

But lest the historian should be exalted above measure by the evident importance of this task, it is necessary to take account of certain limitations of its value. It must be acknowledged, for one thing, that the greatest books need such intervention of learning least. They are greatest for that very reason, or at least are known to be greatest by that sign. They can be read in translations, in remote lands and new times, with undiminished delight and inspiration. Men may not find in them what their first readers found, or just what their writers meant. They may bring with them to their reading and carry over into the book itself thoughts and feelings of their own. For a book is great, as Longinus taught, not only because it so transports us and carries us away with it that we feel as if we had ourselves

produced what we read, but also because it impels us to new thoughts, such, we feel sure, as the author would himself have if he were in our place. The immortal books have this quality of perennial vitality and ready adaptability to all minds and all ages. The human element in them is greater than the national or individual, although it may be the fortunes of a nation or an individual that they describe. In the immediateness and power of its human appeal the Bible has been found to possess pre-eminently among books this quality of universality. In the form of a history of the Israelitish people and of its great men it brings to classical and satisfying expression the religious thoughts and feelings of man. We do not so much need painfully to work our way backward that we may become contemporary in our mental mood and atmosphere with this book because the book has in an extraordinary degree the power to make itself contemporary with us. Looking at it as a whole, as a book, it is certain that the man of genuine and deep humanity will find the best that is in it more surely than the man of learning.

But, still further, even in parts of the Bible where the help of learning is more necessary than it is in the book as a whole,—as indeed in other books where the need is greater than it is in this one,—it should not be overlooked that the task of scholarship is only to prepare the way. It can remove some of the obstacles that lie between our minds and the mind of the writer; but when it has brought us into his presence it must stand aside. An inner sympathy and communion of spirit with spirit remains the condition of the true reading of a book, or rather constitutes the nature of true reading. That process of making the past live again which must constitute the most religious use of a sacred literature remains essentially the work of the imagination. Historical studies perform their highest task when they enable us more easily and completely to overcome the real hindrances to sympathy which differences of language and of age and race create, when they liberate the imagination and leave one free to read the book as his own, in the light of his own experiences and for the satisfaction of his own needs. All this, then, is a negative service of historical science, and in regard to it our greater danger is that we shall forget that it is only a means to an end, and shall

fancy that we are really reading the book when we read it with constant reference to the circumstances in which it was written and with a realizing sense of the world of thought which it presupposes.

But there is a more positive side of the help which history offers to religion. What it brings to light from its search below the surface of the Biblical records is in part itself of obvious religious significance. Historical study has enabled us to recover in its great outlines the course of development of morals and religion in Israel, and the causes and processes through which Christianity came to be. It has also given us a far closer and truer view of the great personalities who in part appear to be determined by that development and represent its successive steps, in part seem rather to have determined the development, to have anticipated and fixed its later stages, and to stand themselves above it as permanent types of the higher life of man. These two discoveries can make strong claims to be of direct and great value to religious faith and life. This again is sometimes declared to be the complete answer to our question. Revelation, it is said, consists in the historical facts which are the deeds of God, not in the records which are the imperfect recollections and interpretations of men. When the historian searches out the facts before and below the records, he is simply putting the deeds of God in the place of the traditions of men. This can be only of advantage to religion.

Now it would be neither wise nor right to depreciate the real value to religion of our modern conception of the course of Israel's religious history. The disclosure of the actual relation between the legal and the prophetic movements cannot but aid the religion of the spirit in its slow triumph over the religions of authority. In the light of historical study it is easier to accept the prophetic and Christian principle that God requires not sacrifice, but righteousness and mercy and humility before him. The development of morals and religion in Israel which the modern historian traces, though it goes forward without miracle, is to our minds far more worthy of being called a divine plan and deed than is the picture which the Jewish church conceived and drew of its past, in accordance with which the Old Testament

canon was shaped. The facts which lie below the surface, which only historical study can uncover, are to our way of thinking more impressive and in our struggle for faith more helpful than the picture which appears on the surface of the books. So also it can hardly be questioned that the better knowledge of the great prophets, of the apostles, of Jesus himself, which has been gained by historical study, must prove only useful and helpful to the purity of religious faith and the reality and depth of religious experience. Here too the closer approach to facts which historical science permits is at the same time an approach to greater values. In the Old Testament it is especially the books of the pre-exilic prophets which are given a heightened human and religious worth through historical research. These books do indeed contain passages which have their virtue in themselves and make the same appeal before and after the historian's work. But as a whole such books as Amos and Hosea have become through modern study far stronger in their appeal to conscience and to faith than they were before. The figures of Isaiah and Jeremiah have been given a new power over the higher life by the separation of their own words from later additions to their books, and by a better understanding of their times and of their influence upon the great historic movement in which they stand. The same may be said of the advantage gained from a nearer and more human view of the Apostle Paul. And surely in the case of the gospels, if the critical comparison of the Fourth Gospel with the other three, and of the three with one another, has brought us nearer to the actual words and the living personality of Jesus, and if a comparison of his teachings with what preceded and with what followed has thrown light on their meaning and significance, who would undertake to deny that in this case historical study, when it leads us from the records and through the criticism of them to the facts behind, is taking us from the thing of less to the thing of greater value for religion?

Yet even here an historian cannot but acknowledge certain limitations of the religious value of his work. It is almost self-evident that religious faith will never be able to rest securely, as on its ultimate foundation, upon the results of scholarly research. These results have not the certainty and permanence which relig-

ion requires. Moreover, if historical research were the condition of a right religious use of the Bible, the book would be taken from the hands of the people, and Christianity would become either an esoteric pursuit of the learned few or a religion of submission on the part of the many to the authority of a new priesthood of scholars. This would be a radical and disastrous departure from that which scholars themselves recognize as most characteristic of the religion of Christ and of Paul, that it was a religion for the common people, and emphasized rather the dangers than the advantages of learning. It should be a chief concern of scholars to reassure religious people, and first of all their own religious natures, of their full freedom and first rights in the Bible, to quicken sympathy and liberate "that imagination which is spiritual vision," to revive joy in the book, the reverent and exultant joy which it is the greatness of a great book to inspire. Two things might contribute to this end. The historian on his part should more fully recognize that in dealing with the Bible he is dealing with a book of literary quality and power, and that in such a book facts, especially concealed facts which it requires his special skill to uncover, are usually not the things of greater value. What is true of other great books is presumably true of this one, that their eminence as well as the persistence of their power over men is due not to the facts they impart, but to the thoughts and feelings which have transfigured the facts and made them their own language and incarnation. Scholarship may fairly be called upon to assist in the recognition of this quality in the book. Such analysis of the secret of the actual power of a book is in fact the chief task of proper literary criticism. The other thing religion itself must supply. Such facts as historical science brings to our secure possession, that development of morals and religion, that action, if one prefers so to describe it, with its tragic element, and its universal human appeal, those great men, in their human reality and in their typical significance, religious faith and experience must undertake to master, to make a living factor in the present life of the spirit. But with this we have advanced to the fourth division of our treatment.

IV. There are places in the Bible in which religion helps historical science, places in which history has less to say in the

way of suggestion and guidance to the man of religion than religion has to say to the historical student. I must anticipate an instinctive dissent from the proposition that religion can direct or assist scientific research. It is easier for us to affirm that science can help religion in the weighing of values, than that religion can help science in the determination of facts. No doubt religion has often transgressed its boundaries by demanding that history reaffirm matters of fact on which faith has been accustomed to depend. Since faith finds the Biblical history at its high points unique in power, it has wished the historian to demonstrate that it is there unique also in its causes and processes. Because religion has required miracle, and science asks for rational order, religious interests have often appeared to obstruct rather than further the progress of science. It has seemed best, therefore, that scientific studies should go on their way without regard to religious feelings. Science seems to us to have a greater objectivity and to require a more unconditional assent than religious needs and hopes. It is easier for us to give science the first place and to let religion follow as it may. It is no doubt the duty of religious faith to listen to what scholars may say of the books and persons and events which it is accustomed to value. When something clear and confessed emerges out of the currents of Biblical criticism, faith should no doubt undertake to adjust itself to the new facts; or rather—and this makes an important difference—it should attempt to interpret the newly discovered facts to the spirit of man, to bring to light the spiritual significance of the facts; or perhaps—and this would make a still further difference—it should proceed to impart to the facts spiritual significance. It cannot be necessary or appropriate for our religious nature to wait in an attitude of mere submission upon the dictates of our reason. It is rather the function of religion to help science by bringing a needed supplement to its work; to help man, we should rather say, by adding to his growing knowledge spiritual meaning and human interest. Nothing could better illustrate this function of religion with reference to the results of historical study than Wordsworth's classic description of the function of poetry in relation to science. If the work of men of science, he says, should ever create any material revo-

lution in our condition and in the impressions which we habitually receive, if their discoveries should become familiar to us and the relations under which they are contemplated should be manifestly and palpably material to us as enjoying and suffering beings, then the poet will be ready to follow the steps of the man of science, and will regard his discoveries as proper objects of the poet's art. "If the time should ever come when what is now called science, thus familiarized to men, shall be ready to put on, as it were, a form of flesh and blood, the Poet will lend his divine spirit to aid the transformation, and will welcome the Being thus produced, as a dear and genuine inmate of the household of man." It is such a function as this that the religious spirit has now to fulfil with reference to the results of historical science in the study of the Bible. The pursuit of science here, as in other regions, lies apart from common human life; and the knowledge thus gained "is a personal and individual acquisition, slow to come to us, and by no habitual and direct sympathy connecting us with our fellow-beings." The knowledge of men of science cannot be made the common possession of men,—that is, the common people cannot be made to rejoice in it and live by it,—through mere popularizations. The results of scientific research must not only be put in untechnical language and brought down to the level of the average intelligence, they must be translated into something living and human, lifted up to the level of the universal and the spiritual; and this transformation, in the case of such a literature and history as the Bible contains, can be accomplished only by the religious spirit. Religion, therefore, has something of its own to do with the outcome of the historian's work before truth of science can become truth rejoiced in as "our visible friend and hourly companion," truth that can be sung in a song in which all human beings can join. We have efforts enough from the side of science to popularize its discoveries, but not yet efforts enough, or efforts free and creative enough, from the side of religion, to give to these discoveries spiritual significance and so common interest and value to humanity. It is no doubt true that this can be done only so far as the results of scientific study are secure and generally accepted and familiar. Perhaps therefore the task that rests

upon our generation is that of reaching assured results, and letting them be generally known, accustoming the people to the facts as fast as they are ascertained. But the search for spiritual values cannot be postponed without spiritual danger and loss. We are not doomed to an exclusively intellectual use of the Bible, nor are we justified in leaving the religious interpretation of the book to a coming generation which shall inherit the knowledge our own has gained. Religion should follow closely the steps of science, and should be ever at its side, "carrying sensation into the midst of the objects of the science itself."

It is evident enough that for his own sake, for the sake of a sound and whole human nature, the scientific student should be at the same time a man of religion. But it is not so evident that this union of religious with scientific interests is required also for the sake of science. Has our experience of religious values the right, at any point and in any measure, to influence our decisions as to matters of fact? The poets have not always followed the advance of knowledge; sometimes they have taken the lead and anticipated by the foresight of genius that which science has afterward discovered or experience confirmed. Such prophetic forecasts need not, indeed, be regarded as simply miraculous. The poet may be only more conscious than other men of the deeper movements of human development, a keener and more sensitive observer of the signs of the times. Moreover the poet's vision enters into human life as itself a reality, and works as an ideal and a motive toward its own actualization. Is there, then, anything analogous to this in the religious use of the Bible? Has the sense of religious value any proper power of its own to detect reality, any right to influence the historian's judgment as to facts?

There are those even among modern thinkers who hold to the right of religious faith to decide at some crucial point questions of historical fact. One of the most notable instances of this appeal is the well-known position of Professor Herrmann, defended in his *Communion of the Christian with God* and in other writings. The fact of Jesus of Nazareth, he argues, the historical reality of his personality or inner life, is so far a part of the present experience of one who finds God and forgiveness through

the reading of the gospels, that it can be affirmed by such a person on the ground of such an ethical and religious experience, in advance and independently of historical research. Herrmann's interest is to free religion from dependence on the uncertain results of the historical criticism of the gospels; but many who sympathize with this aim hesitate to say that at this one point only in human history a question of historical fact can be decided apart from the study of historical evidence, that here the past becomes present and can be experienced as real in a sense and by a process that has no parallel elsewhere. How far, it will at once be asked, can such inner assurance go? How many facts, and just what facts, go to make up that picture of the inner life of Jesus which religious faith can of itself affirm to be historical? Can it affirm the fact of the resurrection? Can it decide the authenticity of the words, "Come unto me all ye that labor," or, "In my Father's house are many mansions"? This event and these words have entered deeply into religious experience, yet history will certainly not in the end confess that it has no duty to weigh evidence and no right to reach a decision as to their historical character. In regard to such questions of bare fact as these,—did this thing take place as it is written, or not? were these words spoken by this man, or by another?—religious experience can hardly be allowed to take the lead and go forward alone to the end. Yet it cannot fairly be urged that the influence which religious feeling inevitably exerts in such cases is altogether out of place and ought simply to be overridden. The religious value of a record of historical persons and events is itself an historical fact. That the record has such power over us today is due to the power which the facts had over the writer. That power is something with which the historian must reckon. It is an actual historical force, a cause which is not only needed for the explanation of its effects, but requires an adequate cause for its own explanation. It may be, therefore, that in some cases the power of a story is valid evidence of the actuality of events. Besides this purely historical consideration it may be affirmed that we are not obliged as historians to renounce our assumption as theists that the good and the true belong together, that a belief of which the effect is more good than bad must have in it more truth

than error. We must, however, guard against the natural mistake of assuming that the truth which the good we experience attests is truth to fact; for it may often be rather the truth of ideals, poetic truth even if expressed in the form of an historical record, truth which the facts symbolize, rather than truth which depends upon the facts for the validity. The inference from the goodness and power of the effect of a narrative upon us to the actuality of the facts narrated is therefore one that ought not to be made upon the impulse of feeling but only after careful consideration. Not when to religion itself its experience appears to rest upon the actuality of an historical fact, but only when to a fair historical and psychological judgment the power actually exerted by a recorded fact is evidence of the reality and nature of the fact itself, does religious experience have this sort of right to help science to its decisions. The historian should receive and use the testimony of religion, but religion should not attempt to predetermine the conclusions of history.

The distinction thus suggested is one which we make with little difficulty in the case of nature and the science of nature. That it has its application to literature is clear, and though it presents peculiar difficulties in the case of the Bible, its right application there is also peculiarly important. When science has gone forward to great and secure discoveries, such as the Copernican astronomy, or the laws of gravitation and evolution, the poet and the man of faith must follow with their effort to find spiritual meaning in these new conceptions of the universe, and to give them spiritual value. But our enjoyment of a sunset does not follow after our understanding of it. It is not through the intellect that we experience this joy, and yet it is an experience through which we come into touch with a great reality, Beauty. There are two things that science can do in such a case. It can attempt a physical explanation of the sunset, and set forth the conditions of atmosphere and the laws of light that account for it. In this it goes its own way quite independently of aesthetic enjoyment, and with very little influence upon it. But science can also attempt to describe and explain our enjoyment of the sunset, and to analyze and define our sense of beauty. This is a higher thing than the other because the enjoyment is a higher

kind of reality than the objective fact; or, rather, our sense of beauty is a higher faculty than our sense of sight. Yet in this case science follows, while feeling leads the way. The task of science is of secondary importance, and if the pursuit of it dulls the feeling itself, the loss is greater than the gain.

We have already given a place to the cases in which it is the task of religion to follow science in its greater and surer achievements, and to make the new knowledge helpful to the higher life. But how are we to define the cases in which religious feeling naturally takes and rightly keeps the first place? What are those feelings experienced by the human spirit in the reading of the Bible, which remain independent of anything that historical science can do with the objects which call forth this experience, and superior to anything that psychological science can do with the experience itself? Illustrations will answer these questions better than generalizations. The Old Testament is an intensely national literature, yet in it the stories of the heroes of Israel and the fortunes of the nation are so told that they have been enjoyed by many nations through many ages. This means that men have seen in these stories a mirror of human life. The greatness of the Old Testament consists in the transformation by which in these books particular and local matters have become the symbol of the faiths and hopes of humanity. This is the region in which religion has independence and superiority.

To suggest somewhat more definite illustrations, let us look at the great action which the Bible records, and at the great characters depicted in it. The action in the presence of which we seem almost everywhere in this book to stand has God and man as its persons, a holy God and sinful man, and consists in their relations to each other. It involves two tragedies, the punishment of the sinner, which is tragic because the power of sin and the weakness of human nature make his punishment appear almost to be his destiny; and the suffering of the good, which, tragic though it is, and often an oppressive burden upon the human spirit, becomes endurable and even satisfying when it is seen to be a suffering of good for evil, vicarious and redeeming in its effect, a suffering which, as the free offering of love, may even reach the supreme height of virtue, and impress our souls

as nothing less than the suffering of the divine. This action, not of the New Testament only, but of the Old Testament as well, the historian is likely either not to see at all or to regard as a theory imposed upon the facts; and since he finds it also in other religions, he may explain the theory as ultimately a mere myth. But sinning and suffering human beings have always understood its truth; and men of humane culture and poetic sense, finding it not only in this book but in the great epics and tragedies of literature, will be more inclined to assent to it as poetic truth than to set it aside either as speculative dogma or as mythology. In such a matter as this, which is no mere question of fact, religious feeling may take the lead before historical research. Although it is not a question of mere fact, yet it does concern realities. Sin and redemption, suffering and love, are not less real because it is not by our scientific reason that we can grasp them.

In the case of the great characters of the Bible, as in the case of its great action, the greater value and the higher reality may be of a sort that escapes the understanding and imparts itself to the soul. The picture of the character may have its purpose and real significance in the ideal truth which it embodies, and this we cannot expect the pure intellect to discern. If it be objected that this looks in the direction of allegory, the reply must be that allegory has in fact borne witness, over against literalism, to the qualities in the Bible that move the heart and impart joy, and to the freedom which is our right in the reading of great books. The mistake of allegory is that it is itself too intellectual and literalistic; that it attempts to set forth poetry in scientific forms, and thereby strikes a path which is as far from the true appreciation of the Bible as poetry as it is from the right understanding of its original meaning and of the facts of history which it records.

It is in the gospels that we find the greatest difficulty in distinguishing between fact and truth, between the rights of science and those of religion. It is commonly urged by scholars that our four gospels are all products of Christian faith and devotion, and that if we would recover the historical Jesus it must be in part by detecting and eliminating from the gospel narratives

just those traits and that coloring which betray the idealizing influence of reverence and love. That this critical effort is inevitable we must confess. That some of its results remove obstacles which stand in the way of a spiritual appreciation of Jesus is beyond doubt. But two things must be evident to the most ardent critic: that the historical problems presented by the gospels are so complex that differences and uncertainties must always remain as to many important matters of fact in the life and teaching of Jesus; and that no synopsis of the gospels, no reconstruction of sources, no critical life of Jesus, no exposition of his teachings has, or can ever have, the religious power that the gospels themselves possess. Is it impossible, then, that these books should be read for their religious greatness even by those who study them also as historical documents? Is it necessary to lose the value of the books as they are, even though we are assured that in searching out the facts beneath the records we are making our way down from great to still greater treasures? May not a part of the help here so urgently needed come from a freer recognition of the character and worth of these books as literature, that is, from a fuller and more confessed, a less apologetic and more grateful sense of the value of the faith and feeling, the reverence and love, that shaped and that inspire the gospel pictures of Christ? This does not mean that religious feeling or faith is to pronounce at will upon matters of outward fact as to the deeds and words of Jesus, least of all that in so doing it may take advantage of insufficient evidence and the consequent hesitations or disagreements of historians. The things about which as facts faith can decide are things which our eyes could not have seen nor our scientific observations have verified, however near we had stood to them. Faith has now the same rights and responsibilities that it had then with reference to questions of truth and of fact. It has now the right and the duty to determine those realities which, if we had been present, we could have perceived only upon religious conditions, not by sight but by reverence and love. In reference, for example, to the resurrection of our Lord,—the empty tomb, the fortunes of the body of Jesus, the number and order of the appearances, and even their nature are matters which belong to historical research

and to psychological interpretation. In all these matters there is more danger of our being misled by religious presumptions and wishes than likelihood of our being helpfully guided by religious insight and experience. But on the other hand the reality of a life after death is not, and in spite of the assurances of some men of science I should wish to affirm that it never will be, a matter for science to determine, never a matter that we can either experience by means of our senses or demonstrate by reasoning. This was as true when Peter and Paul saw the risen Christ as it is today. What belongs to religious experience now belonged to it then. The fact that historical evidences are conflicting or obscure does not justify religious interests in attempting to close questions which the evidence leaves open.

Questions of the authorship of books and the authenticity of sayings are also, of course, primarily questions for historical study to decide. These are questions to which, if we had been present, our senses could have given answer. They are questions of this world, not of that other world the consciousness of which is religion. The eternal beauty and truth of a saying religion can attest, but not any outward fact about it, not when or by whom it was spoken or written. Yet this is a point at which a certain effect of religious faith may be inevitable and within faith's proper sphere. If we had heard Jesus speak, as his disciples heard him, our ability to repeat his words would have been partly limited, as theirs was, by our understanding of his meaning; and this would have been conditioned by the closeness of our sympathy with his character and purposes, by our reverence and our love. But these conditions are the very substance of that other world in which religion has the first place. If a religious condition would then, in a measure, have determined the truth of our memory and report of the words of Jesus, a religious condition may now, in the same measure, influence our judgment as to the truth of the report of his words in the gospels. The influence of the total impression of the accounts of Jesus upon our decision of matters of detail as to what he did or said is of course perfectly valid in a purely historical study; but one would hardly venture to say that a sharing in some measure of the religious experience of Jesus, or an attitude of religious

reverence toward him, cannot deepen a man's appreciation of his character and increase the purity and truth of that total impression by which even questions of fact are affected. Even here, however, the difference between truth and fact must be kept clear. The saying, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," may be fully true as an expression of the mind of Christ toward men even if it was not spoken by Jesus himself. The Fourth Gospel need not be by a personal follower of Jesus, and need not be, as a whole, a record of words which he actually spoke, in order to justify us in the feeling that this book brings to light, in some directions, greater depths of the actual consciousness of Jesus than the other three, or gives on certain matters a more adequate account of what his life and words actually signified in human experience. If the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians had come to us not in a letter of Paul but in a gospel, no one would have doubted that it truly expressed the mind of Christ, whatever judgment may have been passed as to its origin. Standing as it does in Paul's epistle, Christ is nevertheless its author; it is a genuine utterance of the spirit of Christ, as Paul would be the first to affirm.

The greatness of the Bible as a book among books has been proved by the only tests that determine the greatness of any book, by the quality and extent and permanence of its influence, by the kind and degree of joy that it has produced in men. It is natural therefore to suppose that it possesses the qualities that make other books great. But the greatness of great books depends little upon their accuracy as records of facts. It depends chiefly on the universal human truth which has transfigured the facts, on the ideals and inner experiences of which, through the power of a great spirit, the facts have become symbols and embodiments. The Bible is surely in its greater parts, and indeed as a whole, no mere record of historical facts. It is already, throughout, a religious transfiguration of facts, and has in this its power and value. When as historians we pursue our task of removing the interpretations with which the facts are overlaid, we are often sacrificing the greater for the less. It is better to see the facts as prophets and apostles saw them, trans-

figured by faith and vitalized by passion, than to see them just as they happened. It is indeed only because they were so transfigured that the facts had their permanence and power in human history. We must get behind the transformation and set the facts again in the light of common day if we would understand how they came to pass; but we must let them be reclothed again in the bright garments of passion and reverence if we would even understand their influence upon the course of events, still more if we would make our own their spiritual value. Whenever, then, in the Bible this inner light is of more importance than the facts it illumines, religion may rightly claim the first place, before historical study, in the reading of the book.

The order of change in our religious use of the Bible may then prove to be something like this. In the first place is the stage out of which we have come, at which the past as the book records it is imposed upon the present as an external authority, the assumption being that this past, these facts and this record and interpretation of them, belong not to this world but to the other, not to the world of science but to that of faith. Then comes the stage through which we are passing, when science, and particularly historical science, brings forcible deliverance from that bondage, and teaches us to view the past as past. Here the assumption is that this history is like other histories and this book like other books. Then should follow a further stage, at which, while the rights and achievements of historical criticism are freely accepted, the power that lives in the book itself is once more felt. Then religious feeling and imagination will make the past again present, and we become able to make our own the faith and vision of the writers of the book, and in their spirit, though in our own way, to conquer our own world by faith. We shall then, in a sense, return from the study of sources and facts to the enjoyment of the book as it is, and read it with that union of transport and reverence with which the greatest products of the human spirit should be read; with transport as if the words were our own, and with reverent wonder because of their divine excellence and power.