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ART. I.—REVIEW.

Book on the Soul, First part. Book on the Soul, Second part. By the Rev. T. H. Gallaudet, &c.

THERE is, perhaps, no field for benevolent enterprise, which has been more neglected, or which promises a richer harvest to the cultivator, than the preparation of suitable books for children. It is somewhat surprising that the attention of philanthropists has been so little turned to this subject, and that while so much has been published of late on the importance of education, and of commencing our efforts early, so little has been done in the way of furnishing the means of communicating knowledge to the minds of children. At first view, it seems an easy task to prepare such books as are needful for the instruction of youth; yet when we come to ponder the subject deeply, we cannot but confess, that it is a work of extreme difficulty. We do not speak of the elementary books which are needful to teach the art of reading: these, however useful, communicate no instruction to the mind; they only furnish one means of acquiring knowledge. We refer to books adapted to the minds of children in the several stages of their development, and which are calculated, especially, to train the thoughts, 'to teach the young idea how to shoot;' and by which their

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ART. III.—ON THE USE AND ABUSE OF SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY.

A SYSTEM of theology is a methodical disposition of scriptural doctrines, with due connexion and arrangement, so far as they are susceptible of a scientific form. Such a work may contain either a simple enunciation of truths under appropriate topics, or the body of proof by which these are sustained. But within the latitude of our definition are comprised, not only the volumes of professed theologians, but even confessions, catechisms, and other symbolical books of churches.

The origin of systems is to be sought in the laws of the human mind. The Scriptures present us with divine truth, not in logical or scientific order, but dispersed irregularly under the various forms of history, precepts, promises, threatenings, exhortations, and prophecies. It is scarcely left to the option of the reader whether he will classify these truths in his own mind; for this classification begins and is pursued, spontaneously, with regard to all departments of human knowledge. Every man, whose reasoning faculty rises above that of the idiot, is conscious of an attempt to refer each successive acquisition of knowledge to its proper place in the general fund of his recollections, and to connect it with its like among that which is already known.

It is very evident that the order of truths as they are presented in the Scripture is not intended to be the only order in which they shall be entertained in the mind. If this were the case, all meditation would be useless, since this exercise does not reveal new doctrines, but, by giving rise to comparison of those already known, in various connexions, discovers the relations and dependencies of all. The illustration of Lord Bacon is well known: the water of life as contained in the fountain of the Scriptures, is thence drawn and set before us, very much in the same manner as natural water is taken from wells. For when the latter is drawn, it is either first received into a reservoir, whence, by divers pipes it may conveniently be conducted abroad for general use; or it is at once poured into vessels for immediate service. The former methodical way, adds this philosopher, gives origin to systems of theology, by

which scriptural doctrine is collected in scientific form, and thence distributed, by the conduits of axioms and propositions, to every part.*

No primitive Christian could have answered the question, *What is Christianity?* without proceeding to systematize its truths in a greater or less degree: and every reader of the Holy Scriptures undesignedly pursues the same method. For instance, the various attributes of God are revealed in Scripture, not in theological order, nor consecutively, but in various places, by means of scattered examples, sometimes figuratively, sometimes by implication, and never all at once. Now it is manifestly desirable that every man should have a connected idea of the perfections of Jehovah; and the reader of the Bible will necessarily lay together the various representations, and thus conclude that God is spiritual, eternal, infinite, immutable, omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, most true, most holy, most wise, and most good. This aggregation of truths is, in fact, a system, and it is precisely thus that systematic theology has its origin. No man can converse with a Scottish mechanic, who happens to be a good textuary, without discerning that he has his heads and topics to which he refers all his scriptural knowledge, and that the doctrines which he believes are reduced to a classification more or less exact. Indeed, each of us may bring the matter to a speedy test by looking within and inquiring whether such an arrangement of our religious tenets is not constantly going forward, with the gradual increase of our settled opinions. This will be clear or obscure, logical or confused, according to the correctness and extent of our knowledge, and the sagacity and vigour of our intellect. It may be vitiated by the addition of that which is extraneous, or by false expositions of Scripture; but such a syllabus of divine truth is possessed, in memory, if not in writing, by every Christian, whether wise or simple.

The association of ideas affords a natural ground for classification; though by no means the sole ground. Mere similarity of particulars may serve as a basis for technical arrangement, as in the Linnæan system of botany, but this is scarcely a philosophical method. The more any department of knowledge partakes of the character of a pure science, the greater is its susceptibility of being systematized; and this is eminently the character of divine truth. There was a time, indeed,

* De Augm. Scient. lib. lx. c. i. § 3.

when the question was mooted, whether theology is a science, but that time has gone by, and with it should have vanished the occasion of the present argument.

There is danger, however, that we shall be charged with disrespect to the understanding of our readers, in offering serious proof of a position so tenable, and which, but for party zeal, would never have been controverted. For what are all theological discussions, but so many systems? Every didactic sermon is a systematized chapter of the great book of revelation. Every essay or discourse upon any scriptural truth is an attempt to arrange, under certain topics, and with conclusive arguments, the scattered testimony of inspiration in favour of that truth. The only effect of banishing professed systems would therefore be, to repress all endeavours to present the subject as a harmonious whole, and to leave us in possession of schemes characterized by undigested crudity.

The logical and systematic arrangement of a science has various important uses. It affords aid to the memory; since a thousand insulated and disjointed truths can scarcely be kept in remembrance, while, in their regular connexion and mutual dependency, they may be tenaciously retained, and clearly communicated. The knowledge of a subject may be said to be adequate, only when it is thus known. The heterogeneous mass is clarified and reduced to order, by being ranged under topics according to the inherent differences of the several species, and set off into departments, with reference to the distinction of elementary, secondary, and inferential positions. Thus, in the study of natural history, although the classification of the received systems is in a measure arbitrary, (that is, independent of the philosophical connexion of cause and effects) those things which are homogeneous are placed together, and the mind is enabled to comprehend what would otherwise be "a mighty maze, and all without a plan." In the progress of study, as knowledge is augmented, it is highly advantageous to have a predisposed scheme, to some niche of which every new acquisition may immediately be referred, as to its proper place in the system. This is true, even when the scheme is framed in a merely technical and arbitrary manner. Such was the classification of minerals, as practised before the late discoveries in crystallography; and such the science of chemistry continues to be in many of its departments. But the advantage is immensely greater, when, as is true of theology, the subject admits of a natural, exact, and philosophical dispo-

sition. It is only under such a form of arrangement that we can be in the highest degree made sensible of the admirable and divine harmony of all religious truth, which necessarily escapes us in the examination of detached and dissociated fragments. The system, however brief or imperfect, affords a convenient test of propositions which might otherwise pass unsuspected, and a guide in applying the analogy of faith to interpretation.

But it is as affording a special facility for communicating instruction to others, that we wish to be considered as recommending the systematic arrangement of theology. The history of catechetical instruction, in every age, furnishes a commentary upon this remark. In applying ourselves to the study of any science, we have our choice between two discrepant methods. By the one, we make a commencement, indifferently, with any separate fact or proposition, without reference to its place in the general scheme; and travelling onward from this point, through the whole, we attempt to acquire the knowledge of all the parts; traversing in succession departments the most remote and unconnected. As if, for example, one should attempt to acquire the science of astronomy, by commencing with observations on the ring of Saturn, thence passing to the milky way, or the moon's libration, and then assailing the obliquity of the ecliptic. By the other method, we commence with simple, acknowledged, and fundamental principles, proceed to the demonstration of elementary propositions, and thence by regular deduction to the ramifications of the subject. The latter is the systematic method, and cause is yet to be shown why it should not hold good in theology, as well as in other sciences. The history of the Church, shows us that from the earliest ages it has been deemed advisable to abstract the truths of revelation in a systematic form, for the convenience of instructors and pupils, for the aid of memory, and for the purpose of displaying the completeness and coherence of the entire plan of scriptural knowledge. In certain periods, it is true, flagrant abuses have been connected with these methods, especially during the reign of the Peripatetic philosophy; yet there has been an entire unity of opinion as to the general expediency of the plan. It may not be inappropriate here to advert to some of the predominant schools of systematic theology.

Omitting any particular notice of the patristical systems,

we shall name a few of those writers who contributed to the mass of doctrinal theology before the Reformation. There are those who trace the origin of the scholastic divinity to as high an epoch as the monophysitic controversy in the fifth and sixth centuries; yet it is more usual to consider John Scotus Erigena, a theologian of the ninth century as the founder of this method. It was, however, the Platonic philosophy, by which he endeavoured to elucidate divine truth. He signalized himself as an antagonist of the predestinarians, in the court of Charles the Bold. The Schoolmen, or Scholastics are supposed to have been so called from their training in the theological schools of Charlemagne. This training was little else than regular instruction in the Latin version of Aristotle, the writings of Boethius and Porphyry, and the Peripapatetic dialectics. Three periods are noted by Buhle: the first ends with Roscellinus (A. D. 1089), or the contest between the Realists and Nominalists; the second with Albertus Magnus (ob. 1230), at which time the metaphysics of Aristotle were generally known and expounded; the third extends to the revival of letters in the fifteenth century.* The renowned Englishman Alexander de Hales, holds an eminent rank among the ancient scholastics, as is commonly cited as *Doctor Irrefragabilis*: until the time of Aquinas, his commentary on Lombard was a universal text-book. Thomas Aquinas, *Doctor Angelicus*, and a saint of the calendar, was the pupil of Albertus Magnus, and so close an adherent of Aristotle that he left fifty-two commentaries upon the works of the latter. It is unnecessary to advert to the estimation in which he has ever been held by the Romanists; although it has been satisfactorily shown by Protestants that this truly great man, diverged in a multitude of instances from the doctrines of the Catholic faith, as they are now defined.† Next in eminence was his great competitor, John Duns Scotus, whose dialectic acumen was proverbial, and who is denominated *Doctor Subtilis*. From this rivalry of sects, arose the familiar distinctions of Thomists and Scotists. During the third period, flourished the celebrated Durand, called, on account of his independent boldness, *Doctor Resolutissimus*. This remarkable man was bishop of Meaux, and died about the year 1333. He went out from

* Brockhaus Real-Wörterb. vol. ix. p. 835. Buddei Isagoge, p. 326. Hornii hist. Phil. l. vi. cii. p. 297.

† DORSCHÆUS. Aquinas Confessor Veritatis.

the ranks of the Thomists, and, without going over to the opposite sect, became the founder of a new school. He is supposed by Staudlin to have contributed greatly to the downfall of the scholastic system. To these may be added Occam, an English Franciscan, who opposed the papacy, and encouraged a more liberal method in theology; and Bradwardin, who openly attacked the scholastic system, and maintained that the genuine or Augustinian doctrines had been exchanged for mere Pelagianism. His work *de Causa Dei contra Pelagium*, contains much that savours of a purer theology.

This was the dawn of a brighter day for religious investigation. In looking back from this point upon all the dialectic school, we are struck with the darkness which overspread the field of theology, in consequence of the multitude of sects; the introduction of foreign principles and speculations; the contempt thrown upon sound exegesis; the almost divine honours paid to philosophers and doctors; and the barbarous roughness with which every subject was handled. The bounds of human reason were overleaped, and a recondite sophistry usurped the place of candid argument. It is not, therefore, in this period that we are to seek for any thing like purity in theological systems.

The Reformation gave birth to a new school of dogmatic theology. Luther indeed, though celebrated as a logician, left no work, strictly pertaining to this class; but in the *Loci Communes* of Melancthon, we have model which might do honour to the brightest age of scriptural investigation. It is pleasing to observe with what deference this good man was regarded by his bolder coadjutors. The first edition of this earliest system reformed theology appeared at Wittemberg, A. D. 1521.* Luther characterized the work, as "invictum libellum, et non solum immortalitate, sed quoque canone dignum."† In the Reformed Church, we need not remind the reader of the compendious works of Zuingle, and the Institutes of Calvin. The latter work has passed through innumerable editions, and has appeared in the Latin, French, Spanish, English, German, Dutch, Hungarian, and Greek languages. In the Lutheran Church might be mentioned the leading names of Calixtus, Chemnitz, Striegel, Gerhard, Horneius, Henichius, Hulsemann, Calvius, and Koenig: in the

* Buddeus, p. 346.

† Luth. Op. ii. 241. Wittemb.

Reformed Church, Beza, Bullinger, Musculus, Aretius, Heidegger, Turretine, and Pictet. It would be unjust to the memory of the divines of Holland, who, more than all others, cultivated this field, to omit the names of Rivet, Maresius, Hoornbeeck, and the Spanheims, all of whom followed the philosophical school of Voet; and Burmann, Heidan, Wittichius, Braunius, Witsius, Leydecker, and Hulsius, who pursued the system of the covenants, as marked out by Cocceius.

But time would fail us in following down the stream of systematic writers. This was the age of systems, and a lifetime would scarcely suffice to study those which it produced. Most of these last mentioned were free, to a remarkable degree, from the technical distinctions of the schools, and may be used with profit. It is at least desirable that every theologian should be acquainted with the history of religious opinion. We have fallen upon days in which works of this nature are little prized, and in which essays, pamphlets, and periodicals are almost the only vehicles of theological discussion. Of this it is needless to complain, yet it is mortifying that so much unmerited contempt should be cast upon the learned labours of other days. There are few eminent scholars, it is true, who join in this cant; yet scarcely a week passes in which our attention is not drawn to some ignorant and captious disparagement of all productions of this kind. There are persons who never deign to mention systematic theology without a sneer, and whose purposes seem to demand that they should represent all books in this department as assuming a rivalry with the sacred Scriptures. We disavow the wish to attribute these sentiments and objections to any particular school, or to connect them with any doctrinal opinions held by our brethren; except so far as this, that they are usually avowed by those who contend for greater latitude in speculation, and who protest against any interference with their innovating projects. No very distinguished writer has presented himself as their advocate, and they are usually heard to proceed from youthful and hasty declaimers, yet the arguments even of these demand a refutation when they spread their contagion among the inexperienced; and we would gladly contribute towards a disentanglement of the question.

It would be an unwarrantable hardihood to deny that, among the volumes of past ages, there are systems which lie open to valid objections; but the faults of some are not to be attributed to the whole class. Thus, for instance, it is

common to charge the whole of the continental theologians with the scholastic subtleties of the middle age. The systems of the schoolmen are, indeed, notoriously chargeable with dialectic refinements, and it is not strange, that some of the same leaven should betray itself in the writings of the early reformers, just emerging, as they were, from the dreary night of barbarism. The objection lies against most of the Romish systems. Revelation is here confounded with philosophy; the Scriptures are perverted into accordance with traditions and the schools; and the questions which perpetually arise are, in a majority of instances, frivolous and ridiculous, or knotty and ostentatious. Such, however, are not the faults of our received works, and the only trait which they have in common with the former, is that they profess to communicate the doctrines of the faith, in regular connexion, with scientific order and method, and sometimes with the technical language of the then predominant philosophy. The terminology of the reformers and their immediate successors is a dialect of which no literary antiquary will consent to remain ignorant; it is a source of alarm to students who consult their ease, and even grave divines among us have been sadly disconcerted with the *materialiter*, *formaliter*, &c. of the seventeenth century. Yet the history of theological opinion can never be learned, in its sources, without some knowledge of this peculiar phraseology.

The plan, or schedule, according to which a system is arranged, may be artificial, unnatural, arbitrary, or otherwise inconvenient. It is not every mind which can be satisfied with the method pursued by so many eminent divines, especially in Holland, in arranging the whole circle of truth with reference to the covenants. Others are as much displeased with a historical or chronological plan, which has been attempted. Or the whole work may labour under a fault of an opposite character, namely the want of method, and, under the title of a system, may be an unsystematized farrago. Yet in all such cases, though the objection is granted to be valid, yet the excellence of systems, as such, is no whit disparaged by the failure of special attempts: and, indeed, it is not upon these grounds that the exception is usually taken.

Again, the system may be objectionable, as being incautiously and hastily framed, upon insufficient testimony of the Scriptures. Every methodized body of theological doctrine may be considered as a general theory of the whole sphere of

divine truth. As such, it should be deduced directly from the Scriptures, after a most careful survey, and impartial comparison of all its doctrines. (The work of the theologian here resembles that of the philosopher who reasons from natural phenomena.) There is, indeed, this important difference, that the philosopher is mainly employed in observing the sequence of cause and effect, and in assigning all the changes in natural objects to their true causes, and to as few causes as possible; thus, by induction arriving at general laws:—whereas the theologian is called to arrange isolated truths, already revealed in the form of propositions, and by reducing these to order, to discover the plan and harmony of religious science. In both cases, however, there is the same process to be observed; facts or propositions must be ascertained, generalized, placed in the same category with analogous truths, and reserved until new light enables us to refer them to more comprehensive laws or principles. Now, if in physical science it is so highly important that caution should be used in this process; so as to avoid leaping to a conclusion without a sufficient induction, how great should be the patience, self-distrust, and hesitancy of one who undertakes to pronounce upon the great mysteries of revelation. “The liberty of speculation which we possess in the domains of theory is not like that of the slave broke loose from his fetters, but rather like that of the freeman who has learned the lessons of self-restraint in the school of just subordination.”* This is the dictate of sound philosophy in every investigation; it teaches us not to reject system, but to systematize wisely. It is the neglect of this rule which has given occasion to the scores of heresies with which the Church has been rent. Doctrines taken up from the superficial and apparent meaning of a few texts, have been made the foundation of theories which have possessed scarcely a trait of genuine Christianity. Yet even when a system is absolutely false, the objection prostrates only that particular scheme which is proved to be erroneous. And the question still remains open, how far systematic arrangement is conducive to the progress of sound theology.

The favourite argument of many is this: The Scriptures do not admit of being systematized. This cannot be more impressively stated than in the words of Cecil: “The Bible scorns to be treated scientifically. After all your accurate

* Discourse on the Study of Natural Philosophy. § 201.

statements, it will leave you aground. The Bible does not come round, and ask your opinion of its contents. It proposes to us a Constitution of Grace, which we are to receive, though we do not wholly comprehend it.”* In this argument the premises are stated with sufficient clearness, but we confess ourselves unable to make the necessary deduction of the conclusion. This was the position of the Anabaptists and the Quakers.† It may mean either, that divine truth is in its own nature insusceptible of a regular scientific arrangement, or that it is impracticable for human minds so to arrange it. We contend that so long as it is granted that the propositions contained in Scripture are so many truths, that these are harmonious and accordant, and that some flow by necessary inference from others, it follows that the doctrines of revelation may be topically arranged, exhibited, and discussed. Some religious truths do, indeed, surpass our reason, but it is a mere sophism to argue that they are therefore thrown beyond the limits of any conceivable system; for this very characteristic may designate their place among ultimate propositions. If it is asserted that the imbecility of human minds is such that they cannot arrange and classify the whole of divine truths, inasmuch as these are absolutely intractable, and refuse to arrange themselves under any of our general topics,—we reply that this would put an end to physical philosophy itself, for the same remark holds good in nature. There are exempt cases, extreme phenomena, which are, as yet, explicable by no laws of science, and which must remain beyond the range of all systems as elementary facts. Such are the attraction of gravitation, and the principle of animated life. Still there are a thousand truths which continue to be free from these difficulties, and which may be methodized with profit.

If it should be urged that the simple method in which God has been pleased to arrange truth in the Bible is the only proper method, and that this beautiful simplicity is vitiated by the artifice of systems, we reverently acknowledge that the order of divine revelation in the Scripture is the best conceivable for the immediate end proposed. Yet the nature of truth is not altered by a change in the arrangement of propositions; nor is its simplicity taken away by scientific disposi-

* Remains, p. 118.

† Barclay's Apology, Orig. Thes. x. §. 21. Van Mastricht. lib. 1. c. i. § 6.

tion. Moreover, the argument destroys itself by proving too much. For, by parity of reason, all discourses and essays on theology, all sermons and exhortations of a religious kind, must equally violate this divinely prescribed order; since they cull and dispose the passages of Scripture, not in the method observed in the sacred volume, but with reference to some truth or truths attempted to be established. No one can fail to perceive the frivolity of an argument which would restrict all theology to the regular consecution of chapters and verses in the Bible.†

It has been alleged, that the use of systems has had a tendency to restrict the belief of the theologian within certain prescribed limits, and thus to arm the mind against conviction from passages which, to an unsophisticated reader, would be clear and decisive; and that what is called the Analogy of Faith is a barrier against independent investigation. The application of any such analogy to the exposition of Scripture has been strenuously opposed in modern times. That the principle may be abused, is too evident to admit of denial. Yet, unless the interpreter pursues the course of neological commentators, utterly careless whether the sacred penmen contradicted themselves or not,—this rule, or something tantamount, must be applied. It is the dictate of reason that—a revelation from God being admitted—all real contradictions are impossible. Hence, when a class of truths is satisfactorily deduced, all those which do not quadrate with these, in their obvious meaning, must be interpreted with such latitude as may bring them into unison with the whole. In all interpretation of works, sacred and profane, single passages must be understood in accordance with the general tenor of the discourse. Indeed, so plainly is this a principle of hermeneutics, that we should never have heard the objection, if certain unwelcome doctrinal positions had not been involved. There are truths which lie upon the very surface of the Scriptures, and are repeated in almost every page: these taken together give origin to the analogy or *canon* of faith. The force of reasoning from such an analogy must vary with the extent of the reader's scriptural knowledge, and the strength of his convictions. Every man, however, whether imbued or not with human systems, reasons in this manner. It is by the analogy of faith, that we pronounce the literal interpretation untenable, in all those cases which represent God as the author of moral

evil, or which attribute to him human members and passions. So long, therefore, as God "cannot deny himself," we must resort to this very principle.

The simple inquiry appears then to be, whether the use of a judicious system opens the door for the abuse of the analogy of faith. It is contended, that it necessarily does so, by expanding this analogy so far as to make the whole of a certain theological system a canon of faith, which nothing is suffered to contravene. There are slavish minds in which this effect will doubtless be produced; but the result in such cases would be the same, if, instead of a written system, the learner availed himself of the oral effusions of some idolized errorist. And in this whole controversy, let it be observed, the choice is at last between the dead and the living, between the tried systems of the ancients, and the ill-compacted schemes of contemporaries. We forget the place which has been assigned to the theological system, when we hold it responsible for excesses of this kind. It is by no means a rule of faith, else were it needless to refer to the Bible. It may be compared to the map of a country over which a geographer travels, and which affords convenient direction, while at the same time the traveller does not hold it to be perfect, but proceeds to amend it by actual survey. Without it, he might lose his way, yet he is unwilling to give implicit faith to its representations.

There are many problems in analytic mathematics, in which the unknown quantity is to be sought by successive approximations. In these cases, it is necessary to assume some result as true, and to correct it by comparison with the data. Not unlike this is the process by which we arrive at certain conclusions in the other sciences, and in theology among the rest. If, in the course of our investigation, we are met by scriptural statements which positively contradict any position of the system which is assumed as approximating to the truth; the consequence will be a doubt, or an abandonment of the system itself. Precisely in this way, every independent thinker knows that he has been affected by the difficulties of Scripture. The case would not be rendered more favourable, if he had in his hand no system. As it is manifestly impossible for any one to come to the study of the Word of God without entertaining some general scheme of divine truth as substantially correct, we can see no reason why the student should not avail himself of that which he esteems true in its great outline. It will be no bar to just inquiry, that he is

hereby prevented from hastily catching at specious error, by perceiving that it varies from his guide. Life is too short for every man to be left to the hazard of running through the whole cycle of errors and heresies, before he arrives at the truth; and this is prevented only by presenting to the learner some beacon against seductive falsehoods. He may—as many have done—conclude, upon due inquiry, that his own impressions are right, and his system wrong.

We have compared the theological system to the hypothesis by which the natural philosopher directs his inquiries. The comparison is good for the present instance. The system, like the hypothesis, is not unalterable. It is to be studiously scrutinized, and even suspected; adopted if verified, and rejected if proved to be false. There is a well-known process by which natural philosophers arrive at the primary physical laws, viz. “by *assuming* indeed the laws we would discover, but so generally expressed, that they shall include an unlimited variety of particular laws; following out the consequences of this assumption, by the application of such general principles as the case admits; comparing them in succession with all the particular cases within our knowledge; and lastly, *on this comparison*, so modifying and restricting the general enunciation of our laws as to *make the results agree*.” *Analogous to this is the process according to which, by the hypothetical assumption of a given system, we proceed to determine upon its truth.

But we are here arrested by an objection urged against this whole method of proceeding, which comes in a specious shape, and with the air of sincerity, and therefore demands a serious examination. We are addressed in some such terms as these: “The whole method of investigating theological truth by the advocates of systems is erroneous, because it is diametrically opposed to the principles of the inductive philosophy. Instead of framing a system *a priori*, and making it a bed of Procrustes, to which every declaration of the Bible is to be forcibly adapted, the only safe method is to reject all the hypotheses of divines, to come to the examination divested of all preconceived opinions, to consider the scattered revelations of Scripture as so many *phenomena*, and to classify, generalize, and deduce from these phenomena; just as the astronomer or the botanist uses *physical data* in framing a

* Herschell’s Discourse, § 210.

sound hypothesis. The study of theology should be exegetical, and the obsolete classifications of past ages should be entirely laid aside." We have endeavoured to state the objection fairly and strongly, and we shall now inquire how far it operates against the positions which we have taken. The objection assumes an analogy between theological investigation of revealed truth and physical inquiry into the system of the universe. This analogy we have already noticed, and in reply to so much of the objection as concerns the original investigation of divine truth, we grant that nothing can be more unphilosophical or untheological than to receive any system as true, previously to examination, however it may have been supported by consent of antiquity, or wideness of diffusion. This were to forsake the great principles of the Reformation, and revert to the implicit faith of the apostate Church. We ask no concession of private judgment on the part of the learner; we acknowledge that the final appeal is, in every instance, to the Scriptures themselves. We go further, in meeting those who differ from us, and accept their illustration. Let the Scriptures be considered as analogous to the visible universe; and its several propositions as holding the same place with regard to the interpreter, which the phenomena of the heavens do with regard to the astronomer. Let it be agreed that the method of arriving at truth is in both instances the same, that is, by careful examination of these data, from which result generalization, cautious induction, and the position of ultimate principles. Let it be further conceded that exegesis answers to experiment or observation in the natural world, and consequently that the theologian is to consider exegetical results as the basis of all his reasonings. In all this there is not so wide a separation between us, as might at first appear. We avow our belief that the theologian should proceed in his investigation precisely as the chemist or the botanist proceeds. "The botanist does not shape his facts," says a late ingenious writer. Granted, provided that you mean that the botanist does not *wrest* his facts, to a forced correspondence with a hypothesis. Neither does the genuine theologian "shape his texts," nor *constrain* them to an agreement with his system. But both the botanist and the theologian do, in this sense, "shape their facts," that they classify and arrange the fruits of their observation, and gather from them new proofs of that general system which has previously commended itself to their faith.

There is an entire agreement between the contending parties, as to the independent principles upon which original investigation for the discovery of truth is to be conducted, in every science. It is the method which bears the name of Bacon, though practised, to a limited extent, by the wise of every age. It is the method of Newton, which, in his case, resulted in the most splendid series of demonstrations which the world has ever known. Up to this point we agree, yet we have left the main question still untouched—whether in pursuing this method it is absolutely necessary to reject all the results of precedent labours. It is not merely concerning the way in which original investigation should be pursued, but also the way in which the results of such investigation are to be communicated. The former would be the inquiry how to make a system—how to deduce it from its original disjoined elements; the latter is the inquiry how the general truths thus deduced, may be made available to the benefit of the learner. Systems of theology are in their nature synthetical. They are the result of the toilsome analysis of great minds, and they are to be put to the test by a comparison of all the separate truths, of which they purport to be a scientific arrangement. That they are convenient helps, in the transmission of such results as have been attained by the wisdom and diligence of our predecessors—results which else would have perished with their discoverers—is made evident by reference to the very analogy above stated. In every science, it is by such synthetical arrangements that the observations and inductions of philosophers are embodied, in order to facilitate the advance of those who follow. Thus, for instance, when the Abbé Haüy, by a tedious and laborious induction of particulars, had traced up the apparently amorphous crystals of the mineral kingdom, to certain clear and primitive figures, he reduced the whole of his discoveries to the form of a *system*, so that future crystallographers might with less toil follow out his inquiries, and with immense advantage take up the subject where he left it.

But, lest we should be suspected of the slightest misrepresentation or evasion of the argument, let it be supposed that the gist of the objection is, not that systems are useless, but that they should not be put into the hands of learners, lest they fill their minds with doctrines unproved and unexamined, and close the door against manly and independent inquiry. Far be it from us to lay one shackle upon the chartered free-

dom of the theologian! We would that there were a thousandfold more independence in the search of truth—and that so many hundreds were not enslaved by the prejudice of novelty, whilst they clamour against the prejudice of authority and antiquity. To the objection, under this new phase, we reply: the only possible method of making the labours of past theologians available and profitable to the tyro, is by presenting to him the fruits of these labours in some compendious form. In every other case, the learner is despoiled of all the aids afforded by superior wisdom and learning, and reduced to the condition of one who has to build the whole structure for himself from the very foundation. But it is rejoined, “The Bible is the text-book: Theology is to be pursued exegetically; let the student, with his hermeneutical apparatus, come to the investigation of the Bible itself, to the neglect of all systems of human composition.” Again we reply, that in correspondence with the analogy above suggested, exegesis is the true instrument of discovery, and the test of all pretended results. It may be compared to the glasses and quadrant of the astronomer. But is this all that is afforded to the inchoate astronomer? Let the analogy be pursued. We suppose a professor in this new school of physics to say to his pupil, “Here are your telescopes and other instruments, your logarithmic tables and ephemeris—yonder is the observatory. Proceed to make your observations. Be independent and original in your inquiries, and cautious in your inductions. You are not to be informed whether the sun moves around the earth, or the earth around the sun. This would be to prepossess you in favour of a system. Ptolemy and Copernicus are alike to be forgotten!” What is our estimate of such a method of philosophizing? The unfortunate youth is not permitted to take a glance at Newton’s *Principia*, lest his mind should librate from its exact poise, towards some preconceived opinion. He is reduced to the very condition of the thousands who grope in disastrous twilight, for want of direction. He is called upon to be a Galileo without his powers, or a Kepler without his previous training.

To an unprejudiced mind it must commend itself as reasonable, that the beginner in any science should be furnished at least with some syllabus of its details, which may serve as a clew in the labyrinth of his doubts. In order to discover truth, it is not the safest nor the wisest plan to reduce the mind to the unenviable condition of a *tabula rasa*; although

such is the assumption of certain modern writers. It is highly useful to be informed as well of what has been held to be true, as of what has been proved to be false. For lack of the latter knowledge—the knowledge of preceding errors—our improved theologians are daily venting, with all the grave self-consequence of discovery, the stale and exploded blunders of the dark ages; which the perusal of any single work of systematic divinity would have taught them to despise. The impartiality of the mind is in no degree secured by the banishment of all previous hypotheses. There is a partiality of ignorance, a partiality of self-will and intellectual pride, a partiality of innovation, no less dangerous than the predilections of system. Or, to bring the whole matter to a speedier issue, the condition of mind *in equilibrio*, which it is proposed to secure, is utterly impossible—the merest *ens rationis*—which was never realized, and never can be realized by any one in a Christian country. It is like the chimerical scepticism of the Cartesians, the creature of an overheated imagination. For when you have carefully withheld all orthodox systems of theology from your pupil, he comes to the study of the Scriptures, emptied indeed of all coherent hypotheses, but teeming with the crude and erroneous views which spring up like weeds in the unregulated mind.

The true light in which a system of theology should be viewed by one who uses it as an aid in scriptural study, is as a simple *hypothesis*, an approximation to the truth, and a directory for future inquiries. Every position is to become the subject of a sifting examination, and comparison with what is revealed. Without some such assistance, in the mind, or in writing, the student might spend a life-time in arriving at some of those principles, which, if once proposed to him, would commend themselves instantly to his approbation.

But it is queried: “What if your system should be false?” Let us then go so far as to suppose that it *is* false. It would be no very difficult task to prove that, for this purpose, even a false system, if scientifically arranged, might not be without its uses. Every one who commences the study of the Scriptures, does so with some system, true or false, symmetrical or crude, written or conceived. If he is influenced by no living idols in the world of theologians, and bows to no Calvin nor Arminius, he has within him those causes of error which spring from his own character and education, (or to use Ba-

con's expressive terms) *idola specus et fori*, if not *idola theatri*.* When Kepler began his observations, he no doubt held the old erroneous doctrine of the sphere; but in the progress of inquiry he discovered such irregularity in the orbit of Mars, as was altogether incompatible with a circular motion. Hence he arrived at the truth that all the planetary orbits are elliptical. In this we have an example of a fact impinging upon a system, and causing it to be abandoned. The same thing may be instanced in the case of Martin Luther. It may not be too much to say, that if they had been ignorant of the opinions of their fathers, and had practised upon the rule above-mentioned, their names would never have come down to us. But all this is gratuitous. We are not bound to prove that an erroneous system may have its uses. We put into the hand of the pupil, the nearest approximation to truth, which we can procure, even that which we cordially believe ourselves; and then, to add new guards to the mind, we exhort him to use it simply as a history of what the Church has held; leaving it to his judgment whether it is consistent with the Scriptures. It is the method in which the study of all sciences must be begun; and as all lectures in theology are systems—indeed no other systems are enjoined to be studied in our seminaries—it is in accordance with this very method that candidates for the ministry are every where instructed. There may be a time, at some later period, when a method purely analytic may be attempted; but no man is competent to institute such an analysis, until he has mastered the leading hypotheses of those who have gone before him: and about one theologian in a thousand has the taste for investigations of this kind.

It is not a little surprising that the very persons whose delicate susceptibilities lead them to shrink from the contact of an orthodox system or exposition, lest they should receive some undue bias, are at the same time under no apprehensions from the contagion of German neology. There are, for instance, ministers of our acquaintance who avowedly banish from their shelves the works of Turretine, Scott, and Henry, but who daily refer to the innocuous commentaries of Rosenmueller, Kuinöl, Koppe, and Gesenius. Is it so then, that the only partialities against which we need a caution, are towards what is called orthodoxy—the system of doctrines to

* Nov. Org. Lib. i. Aph. 41.

which we have subscribed? Are there no vicious leanings of the mind in favour of plausible heresies, lofty rationalism, or imposing novelty? Let him answer who has learned the deceitfulness of the human heart.

If systems of theology are assailed upon the ground that they have usurped the place and authority of the sacred canon, we leave our opponents to try the issue with those who are guilty of the offence. We are conscious of no such wish. The formularies of our Church have borne many violent assaults; and, in their turn, all doctrinal works which coincide with them have been denounced. We have no hesitation in "postponing the Confession of Faith to the Holy Scriptures."* If systems of divinity have been raised to a co-ordinate rank with the Word of God, let those answer for it, who are guilty of the impiety. The books themselves are chargeable with no part of it, since they unanimously declare that the Bible only is the standard of faith. Yet shall we deny to any the liberty of making any scheme of doctrine his own *confession of faith*? No constraint has been used to bring any man to such a declaration; nor have we heard of any man who has been required to conform himself to such a system, unless he had previously, of his own free will, confessed it to be a statement of his faith. We may, therefore, dismiss the cavil, as scarcely pertaining to this inquiry.

In view of the absolute impracticability of the visionary scheme now controverted, and the absence of any attempted exemplification of it, we are constrained to look somewhat further for the secret cause of the clamour against systematic theology. And when we regard the quarter from which it issues, we are convinced, that the real objection is, not that systems are exceptionable *qua tales*, but that doctrine is systematized on the wrong side. Systematized heterodoxy is attacked upon its own merits; systematized orthodoxy is opposed because of its form and arrangements. The great standard works in this department are the results of labour, the monuments of tried doctrine; while the ephemeral fabrics of innovators do not live long enough to assume a regular shape. *Hinc illæ lachrymæ!* When the late Robert Hall was arraigned by a certain loyalist, as having written in favour of parliamentary reform, he replied, in terms not inapplicable to this subject: "The plain state of the case is, not

* See Rev. E. Irving's late Letter in Frazer's Magazine.

that the writer is offended at my meddling with politics, but that I have meddled *on the wrong side*. Had the same mediocrity of talent been exerted in eulogizing the measures of ministry, his greetings would have been as loud as his invective is bitter." If the system is false, let this be made to appear,—let its errors be exposed—but until this is done, let no arrangement of divine truth be decried as injurious. In conclusion, we apprehend no evils to our rising theologians from scholastic systems, for the best of all reasons—they know nothing of them. The literature of the day has extended its influence to the domain of theology, and the weekly, monthly, and quarterly receptacles of religious discussion, consume too much of our attention, to leave opportunity for poring over the works of our ancestors.

ART. IV.—ARABIC AND PERSIAN LEXICOGRAPHY.

A Dictionary Persian, Arabic, and English, with a dissertation on the language, literature, and manners of eastern nations. By John Richardson, Esq. F. S. A., of the Middle Temple, and of Wadham College, Oxford. Revised and improved by Charles Wilkins, Esq. LL. D. F. R. S. *A new edition, considerably enlarged by Francis Johnson.* London, 1829, quarto.

A TRULY splendid specimen of British typography, and an invaluable addition to the apparatus of the Oriental scholar. Richardson's Dictionary has been long known to the public. The original form was folio. The quarto edition of 1806 was superintended by the famous Orientalist, Charles Wilkins, who added twenty thousand Persian words from native dictionaries, reformed the orthography, and had type cast under his own inspection. There can be no doubt, that the work received immense improvement by passing through his hands. Richardson was a laborious compiler—Wilkins a philological genius and a finished scholar, who takes precedence of Jones, in point of general depth and accuracy, as well as of chronological priority in Sanscrit learning. In his edition of Richardson, however, he betrayed one weakness. He applied to that vast work his awkward plan for representing