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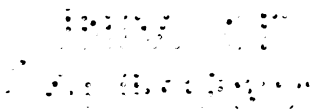
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II

*Ἰπὸ Πνεύματος Ἁγίου φερόμενοι
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THE CANON OF SCRIPTURE.

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THE question I am to treat is the Canon of Scripture, or in other words, what books actually belong to the Bible. The subject is of no small importance, for if the Scriptures be, as all evangelical men admit, the rule of faith and the guide to practice; if they be or contain a revelation from God, we need to know whether the book which we receive and hold as the Bible really deserves that character. Error or even uncertainty here would be a serious drawback on Christian peace and progress. And the more, as it is not infrequently asserted that the confidence of believers is misplaced; that the different works embraced in the sacred volume have found admission there on insufficient grounds, while some have been left out which had as good a right as any others to be in the collection; and that therefore there is need of a critical estimate in each case in order to revise our conclusions and determine afresh what is and what is not part and parcel of the Bible. That this view, by whatever great names it is sustained, is shallow and unscientific, will, I trust, be made to appear in the course of the discussion that follows.

Among Christians, opinions are divided first and mainly by the answers they give to the question, What is the rule by which we are to determine the canonical authority either of the Scripture as a whole or of any part of it? The answers may be reduced to three. Some say it is the Church that gives the requisite authority to the Canon;

(285)

others maintain that it is *divina fides*, or the witness of the Holy Spirit, the author of the word, in the heart of the believer; while a third class insist that historical tradition is the only sufficient basis. And it is clear that these views are mutually exclusive. If a man holds one, he must renounce the others. If one claim that the Church has authority in the premises, he cannot consistently impeach that authority by appealing to something else. So, if he hold to the witness of the Spirit and insists that thus his faith has a divine foundation which alone is adequate, he is debarred from any support that is distinctively human; otherwise he renounces his principle. In like manner the effort to establish the Canon by an appeal to the testimony of those who first received the sacred books and their successors implies that neither the objective ground of the Church's authority nor the subjective ground of *divina fides* is a sufficient basis for our faith that what we receive as Scripture is really entitled to that name.

I. It is an opinion widely diffused through Christendom that we depend upon *the authority of the Church* for the determination of the Canon. This is the view of the Greek and Roman Catholics, and of not a few in the Church of England and its daughter in this country. The great Latin father, Augustine, is on record as saying, "For my part I should not believe the Gospel except as moved by the authority of the Catholic Church" ("*Contra Epis. Manich. Quam Vocant Fundamentum*," chap. 5), and although Calvin endeavors ("Institutes," I., vii. 3) to show that Augustine is speaking only of a supposed case of a person knowing nothing of the matter and therefore dependent upon human testimony, he hardly makes out his position.* Yet, in another of his writings ("De Doct.

* Prof. Henry B. Smith says that the saying "is fairly interpreted as meaning, not that the Church gave authority to the

Christ," ii. 12, 13), Augustine certainly speaks of the canonical Scriptures as depending not on the authority of the Church, but on the witness of the several churches, the weight and influence of which as well as their numbers are to be counted by whoever wishes to be a wise student of the divine Scriptures. And Jerome seems to have been of the same opinion. But the Council of Trent settled the question for Rome in a summary way, and pronounced the usual anathema against all who held the contrary. And all Romanists now would say, as the learned Dr. Doyle once said in regard to another matter, "The Church has spoken at Trent, *causa est finita*." It is to be observed that the reference here is not to the testimony of various bodies of believers in different places as witnesses in respect to the writings which they received as apostolic and inspired, and which therefore were regarded as having a divine sanction, for this is a matter upon which there need be no difference of opinion. But when men speak of receiving the Scriptures on the authority of the Church, what they mean is the deliberate voice of the Church as a great corporate organization, acting through the decision of its chief officials, which may be a general council, or the Bishop of Rome as successor of Peter. (1). The first and obvious objection to this theory is that it is a notable specimen of what is called reasoning in a circle. For we cannot determine the claims of the Church except by the declarations of Scripture, and yet we are to go to the Church to learn what Scripture is. Clearly, no progress can be made by proceeding in this way. In each case the question is begged in advance, and at the conclusion we are just where we were at the beginning. (2). We desire to know how the heads of the Church, whether one or many, reach their conclusion and are able

Scriptures, but gave to Augustine his authority for receiving them" ("Introduction to Christian Theology," p. 192).

to pronounce authoritatively upon the subject. It must be by an immediate revelation from heaven or by their study of the facts in the case. If it be the former, then it is a private matter, known only to themselves and not established to us by any proof, and therefore in no degree entitled to our confidence or obedience. If it be the latter, then the same sources of information are open to us, and we may apply ourselves to them humbly and patiently in the expectation that the divine guidance and blessing will not be withheld. (3). We find nowhere in what purports to be Scripture any reference to the Church as the arbiter of such a question. As the mystical body of Christ, the Church is inexpressibly dear to Him, but He has committed to her no such authority as is here claimed. The oft-quoted expression, "Hear the Church" (Matthew xviii. 17), has reference to the settlement of a private dispute between individuals, and is merely a statement as to the exercise of discipline and one that is essential to the preservation of a society, but it bears not even remotely upon the determination of points of faith. (4). Moreover, if the voice of ecclesiastical authority is to settle the Canon, one may well wonder why it was not heard at any earlier period. No such voice was uttered for the first fourteen centuries of the Christian era. Numerous œcumenical councils were held from Nicæa to Basle, yet not one of them took up the subject. It was not until 1441 that Pope Eugenius broke the long silence of ecclesiastics by promulgating on his own authority a list of the books of Scripture, being impelled to this doubtless by the terrible confusions of that period. This list was faithfully reproduced a century afterward by the Council of Trent. But these were novel procedures. During all the fourteen centuries that preceded, the people of God, whatever their conflicts and trials, seem never to have felt any need of an authoritative decision on the limits of Scrip-

ture. The question was often discussed and there were various opinions, but no one thought of having an exact definition imposed upon clergy or laity. And if before the division of Christendom a decree of this kind was not sought or made, still less is there need to look for it in the stormy days which succeeded the revival of letters in the fifteenth century. All that any number of churches could do now would be to reaffirm a conclusion already reached on other and independent grounds.

II. When the Reformers, in the 16th century, broke with Rome, they of course rejected the authority of the Church as an arbiter of the Canon. What they adopted instead of this was *divina fides*, or the spiritual perception of the believer. The view was formulated in the Gallican Confession in these words. After stating the books by name, it says: "We know these books to be canonical and the sure rule of our faith, not so much by the common accord and consent of the Church as by the testimony and inward illumination of the Holy Spirit which enables us to distinguish them from other ecclesiastical books upon which, however useful, we cannot found any articles of faith." It was thought that in this way the faith of the Church in its sacred books was taken off from any human foundation, and placed upon one that was simply and purely divine. But such a notion certainly confounded things that differ. It is one thing to know by the immediate action of the divine Spirit upon the heart that the great features of the Gospel are true, so that plain men, comparing their own experience with what is stated to them, may feel as sure of the saving truths of the Gospel as if they heard them announced by a voice from heaven; but it is quite another thing to be convinced that *all* the books of the Bible are divine, and to be able, by the inward witness of the Spirit, to discriminate the canonical books from the apocryphal. The for-

mer is a matter of every-day experience, and has been seen times without number in all ages of the Church; but the latter has never been verified, indeed is incapable of verification. Most candid men would agree with Richard Baxter, who said ("Saint's Rest," Preface to Part II.): "I confess for my own part I could never boast of any such testimony or light of the Spirit, nor reason neither, which, without human testimony or tradition, would have made me believe that the Book of Canticles is canonical, and written by Solomon, and the Book of Wisdom apocryphal, and written by Philo, as some think. Nor could I have known all or any historical books, such as Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, etc., to be written by divine inspiration, but by tradition. Nor could I know any or all of those books to be God's word, which contain mere positive constitutions, as Exodus, Leviticus, etc., were it not for the same tradition."

The same point has been expressed in this way, by an American divine of the last generation: "Suppose that a thousand books of various kinds, including the canonical, were placed before any sincere Christian, would he be able, without mistake, to select from this mass the twenty-seven books of which the New Testament is composed, if he had nothing to guide him but the internal evidence? Would every such person be able, at once, to determine whether the book of *Ecclesiastes*, or of *Ecclesiasticus*, belonged to the canon of the Old Testament, by internal evidence alone? It is certain that the influence of the Holy Spirit is necessary to produce a true faith in the word of God; but to make this the only criterion by which to judge of the canonical authority of a book, is liable to strong objections."* The truth is, that, while

* The late Archibald Alexander, D.D., in his work, "The Canon of the Old and New Testaments Ascertained."

professing to base the acceptance of the Canon upon a divine foundation, it really puts it upon one that is essentially human, and therefore variable and uncertain, because men differ so widely in their states of mind at different times and places.

The Reformers were illustrious servants of God, and accomplished a most important work in His service. But even they did not learn "all the truth." Almost without exception they maintained that it was the duty of the civil magistrate to uphold and defend the interests of religion, and yet now it is one of the commonplaces of Christians that the alliance of Church and State is injurious to both. It is not presumptuous, therefore, to challenge any one of their opinions, and subject it to a close examination in the light of Scripture, reason, and experience. The test of canonicity which they felt themselves constrained to adopt in their controversy with Rome, is, we think, open to very grave objections.

1. It needlessly disparages the principle of exercising faith upon adequate evidence, by which we arrive at the knowledge of the existence of God (a point which is assumed in the Scriptures, as indeed it must be in whatever claims to be a revelation from heaven), and by which the whole business of life is carried on. If such faith be stigmatized as merely human, and therefore imperfect and unsatisfactory, what else is this but a reflection upon Him who so constituted us that our lives are governed by conclusions drawn from probable evidence,—*e. g.*, as to the facts of history, the laws of the land, the existence of persons or places we have never seen, etc. The objective evidence in favor of the Canon, as furnished in the writings of the primitive believers, in the general voice of Christendom, in the confessions of acknowledged heretics, and in the attacks of pagan opposers of the truth, is a solid basis of faith, which it is very unwise either to depreciate

or to ignore. As Dr. William Cunningham says: "The evidence of the Canon,—*i. e.*, the proof of the canonical authority of the particular books of Scripture,—is analogous to the evidence of the truth of Christianity. They are both, in a sense, matters of fact, and to be investigated and decided, in the first instance, upon the ordinary principles and grounds applicable to matters of fact" ("Theological Lectures," p. 444). Any theory which sets aside this method of arriving at truth as invalid or untrustworthy, weakens the foundations of all faith, and plays into the hands of the adversary.

2. Practically, this rule makes each individual believer the framer of his own Canon, for it says that the divine authority of Scripture is self-evidencing, only a man must be renewed to see and feel this evidence. But all truly regenerate men are not equally enlightened, and it is quite conceivable that a difference in the degree of their spiritual perception would make a difference in the number of the books they would receive. Personal conviction, on the *divina fides* theory, is all in all, and where this fails, divine authority and binding obligation fail with it, for each man has a right to appeal to the witness of the Spirit in his own heart. Others may differ from him, but this fact gives them no right to dictate to him. So that, in its ultimate result, this theory really sets up the intuitions of man above what is claimed for the written revelation of God. Such a result was not contemplated by its framers, and would have been rejected by them with horror, yet it is a legitimate outcome of the principle.

3. The theory, again, denies any certain Bible to the unregenerate. The evidence for the Canon is, indeed, abundant and clear, but he, in the nature of the case, is unable to see it. His spiritual eyes have not been clarified by grace, and all the abundant indications of the

divine origin and claims of the Bible are to him just as though they did not exist. Surely, this is not in accordance with fact. There are now, as for a long time there have been, many persons destitute of a saving interest in Christ, and yet intellectually convinced that the common Bible is what it claims to be. Such persons have no difficulty at all with the Canon. Whether from early training, or reflection, or observation, or the operations of natural conscience, they have become perfectly satisfied that the Scriptures are a revelation from God, and worthy of all acceptance, although they do not personally accept and confess the Lord Jesus; surely, one has no right to say that these persons are not believers in the Canon. And if we do say it, at what a sore disadvantage are we placed when pressing upon them the claims of the Gospel! All that is necessary for them to say in reply to the most urgent appeal, would be to affirm that they, not having the testimony of the Holy Ghost in their hearts to the divine authority of the Canon, had not, and could not have, any reason to accept a conclusion which can be reached only in this way.

It was an error in the same direction when Coleridge made it a test of the divine word whether it appealed to his moral and spiritual nature with sufficient force. "Whatever finds me," he said, "bears witness for itself that it has proceeded from a Holy Spirit." But this subjects the divine to the human, and makes every man a judge in his own case. Is a doctrine, a precept, a sentiment, a narrative unwelcome to him? Then all that it is necessary for him to say is, that he does not feel it, it does not *find* him. But the fault may be his own. He is so depraved or perverted, so sensual or worldly-minded, that the truth has no power over him, and thus sin becomes its own excuse. This is the inevitable difficulty whenever the Bible is to be tried simply by a subjective

test. Such tests have their use in particular instances, and often render a strong confirmation to a believer's faith, but they cannot of themselves furnish the basis of decision, and settle the question once for all.

The *divina fides* theory was, as has been said, adopted by all, or nearly all, the Reformers, and incorporated more or less distinctly into all the confessions of the sixteenth century. But it by no means continued to have the same acceptance in subsequent times. Stillingfleet ("Origines Sacrae," ii. 8) maintains, distinctly in opposition to any such requirement, that, "where there is any infallible testimony, there is sufficient rational evidence going along with it, to make it appear that it is from God." The judicious Hooker expresses himself to the same effect in his "Ecclesiastical Polity," Book 3, chap. viii. (*ad finem*). I have already cited the opinion of Baxter, and of Principal Cunningham, the latter of whom also says that "the sentiments of Baxter on this subject are quoted and sanctioned by Dr. Chalmers." In Principal Hill's "Lectures in Divinity," the Canon is treated, but not a word is uttered regarding the divine-faith theory. In the "Lectures" of Dr. John Dick, it is expressly repudiated. He does not deny that men may have the witness in themselves of the truth of the Gospel. "But observe," he adds, "that this evidence could go no farther than to satisfy them that those doctrines and promises were from God, by which they were enlightened, sanctified, comforted, and inspired with more than human courage, and with the triumphant hope of immortality. How could it convince them that all the books of the Bible are divine? How could it enable them to distinguish, as the French Church pretends, between the canonical and the apocryphal books?"

Contemporary writers on dogmatics hold the same view. Thus, Van Oosterzee ("Christ. Dogm.," i. 174),

after citing the words of the Belgic Confession on the point, says: "But, as we have seen, the Holy Ghost gives, indeed, testimony to the believer as to the saving revelation contained in the Scripture, yet not on this account necessarily to every single part, and just as little to the Bible *en bloc*. For us, therefore, the question as to the value to be attached to the collection contained in the Canon is, and remains, a purely historical question; the Church, through the medium of which we received it, exists for us, not as an infallible authority, but as a venerable witness to the truth." Dr. Harold Brown, the Bishop of Ely, in his "Exposition of the XXXIX Articles," says on this subject (vi. 2): "We have only to inquire what writings were apostolical; and for this purpose we have recourse to testimony, or, if the word be preferred, to tradition." . . . "The Church of England is not satisfied to rest her faith solely on the authority of any council; neither can she consent to forego all external testimony, and trust to an internal witness alone, knowing that, as Satan can transform himself into an angel of light, so it is possible that what seems the guidance of God's Spirit may, if not proved, be really the suggestion of evil spirits."

The testimony of theologians of our own country is to the same effect. Dr. Enoch Pond, of Bangor, in his "Lectures," treats the whole subject on a historical basis. The eminent Dr. Charles Hodge says ("Theology," i. 153), after giving the usual argument for the Old Testament: "The principle on which the canon of the New Testament is determined is equally simple. Those books and those only which can be proved to have been written by the apostles, or to have received their sanction, are to be recognized as of divine authority." His distinguished son, the late A. A. Hodge, who so worthily filled his father's place, upholds this view in the posthumous

volume, "Popular Lectures on Theological Themes" (pp. 76-7). He says that the rule is that any book written by an apostle, or received generally as canonical by the Church during the age in which it was presided over and instructed by the apostles, is to be regarded as canonical. He expressly denies the validity of "Christian consciousness" in the matter, and says no book can be admitted to the Canon except on the ground of explicit and sufficient historical proof. Nor in the whole context is there any reference whatever to the subjective ground. The equally eminent Dr. Henry B. Smith ("Introduction to Christian Theology," pp. 190-191) says as to the proof of canonical authority: "What we must regard is the specific evidence from competent sources that such and such books and no others have been received as being the word of God to man." In regard to the witness of the Spirit, he asks: "How do we know that we have the Spirit? The Spirit must be tried by the Word. The conviction as to the divine authority of certain writings, which spread itself through the primitive Church, and which furnishes the leading proof of the canonicity of those writings, should not be confounded with the inward persuasion of their authority which the Holy Spirit produces on individual minds." The latest important work on Systematic Theology, produced in our country, that of Dr. A. H. Strong, (Rochester, 1886,) takes the same ground. "We do not receive the Scriptures upon the authority of Fathers or Councils, but only as the Fathers and Councils received them, because we have evidence that they are the writings of the men, or class of men, whose names they bear, and that they are also credible and inspired." "We show their genuineness as we would show the genuineness of other religious books, like the Koran, or of secular documents, like Cicero's Oration against Cataline."

Indeed, the consensus of modern divines in all the evangelical bodies seems to be complete in the rejection of the view of the Reformers, who took no account of the general voice of Christendom, and acted as though each solitary man were brought to weigh for himself the claims of a new book. The only exception of importance is Professor C. A. Briggs, who, in his recent acute and learned work, entitled "Biblical Study," (pp. 108, 123, 203,) reaffirms, in the strongest form, the subjective principle, calls it "the true Puritan mystic," and declares that "this was the so-called formal principle of the Reformation, no less important than the so-called material principle of justification by faith." We have no disposition to question its claim to the former character, whatever that may mean, but the latter part of the assertion is an evident mistake. The formal principle of the Reformation was not any particular method of settling the Canon, but the Bible itself, the living oracles of God, as distinguished on one hand from the traditions of men, however learned or wise or venerable, and on the other from all forms of visionary enthusiasm in men claiming to have an immediate personal revelation from heaven.* All the Reformers,

* "Luther was led to the *material* principle of Protestantism, viz., justification by faith, which is the central point for the right understanding of the development of the whole Protestant system of theology. With this is connected the breaking away from the authority of the Church, and the subjection to the authority of Scripture, or the *formal* principle of the Reformation. Both principles belong together." (Hagenbach's "History of Doctrines," vol. ii., p. 141).

"The doctrinal principle of evangelical Protestantism as distinct from Romanism, is twofold—objective and subjective. The *objective* (generally called the *formal*) principle, maintains the absolute sovereignty of the Bible as the only infallible rule of faith and life, in opposition to the Roman doctrine of the Bible *and tradition*, as co-ordinate rules of faith. Tradition

with one voice, declared this to be the only norm, and the primary source of saving truth, and for this they contended to the last, and with the greatest vehemence. But, surely, it is a sad confusion to substitute for this great granite foundation, upon which everything rests, a mere statement of the way to determine what books belong to the Old Testament and the New. The latter is, indeed, interesting and important, but the former was the logical basis of the whole movement, that without which the Reformation would have died in its cradle.

III. The true method of ascertaining the Canon is that of *Historical Tradition*. This was the course pursued for centuries by the early Church, and what answered their purposes will surely answer ours. The same rule applies to both Testaments. We learn from the Christian Scriptures the existence and character of the Old Testament, but they furnish no list of the books of which it is composed. But this deficiency is completely supplied from trustworthy sources, one of which is Josephus, a native historian, who lived in the first century of our era, and who gives an exact statement of the sacred books, which he claims have come down from their authors without increase, diminution, or alteration, and which, he says, "all Jews are instinctively led from their birth to regard as the decrees of God, and to abide by them, and, if need be, gladly to die for them." The catalogue which he gives corresponds with the one now current among us. The

is not set aside altogether, but subordinated, and its value made to depend upon the measure of its agreement with the Word of God. The *subjective* (commonly called the *material*) principle, is the doctrine by the free grace of God through a living faith in Christ as the only and sufficient Saviour in opposition to the Roman doctrine of (progressive) justification by faith and good works as co-ordinate conditions of justification." (Schaff's "Creeds of Christendom," vol. i., p. 206).

same account is given by the other witness, Philo, an Alexandrian Jew, who flourished in the same century, and is well known by his philosophical writings. Neither of these men was ignorant that there were numerous other writings which made some claim to biblical authority, but they drew a sharp line of distinction between them and the genuine sacred books. These testimonies, strong and sufficient in themselves, are sustained by other considerations drawn from Jewish tradition, from the language of the so-called apocryphal books, from their substance and character, and from the utterances of the Christian Fathers; but it is not necessary to go into details on this point or discuss the many interesting questions it brings up. The Old Testament is so largely sustained by the New, not only as the latter involves the former throughout, but also in the way of various and repeated quotation, that it is of primary importance to maintain the canonical authority of the Greek Scriptures, since this carries with it that of the Hebrew.

In regard to the New Testament the case is by no means so simple as it is with the older book. The rule to be applied here is, that "Every book is genuine which was so esteemed by those who lived nearest to the time when it was written, and by the ages following in a continued series." There are not many who dispute the intrinsic reasonableness of this rule, but there are many who deny that its application will bring out the result which we claim—*i. e.*, the indisputable canonicity of the New Testament as we have it to-day. Every inch of ground in the first three centuries has been fought over again and again, and the din of battle has not yet ceased, nor indeed is it likely soon to come to an end. Passions and prejudices are enlisted, and so much depends upon the issue that it can hardly be pursued with an impartial mind. Of course, in a paper of this kind, a full and minute dis-

cussion cannot be carried on. All that is aimed at is to give an outline of the argument.

We maintain that the Canon can be successfully established from the testimony of those to whom the various inspired writings were originally delivered. By this, of course, it is not claimed, as some seem to have imagined, that there was an official list of sacred writings made by the apostles themselves or the last survivor of them. The books of the New Testament came into existence at various times and places under the guidance of Providence. The propagation of the Gospel was, in the first instance, and for many years, made orally, and with the use only of the Old Testament as written Scripture. In the course of time there grew up a series of compositions, whether narrative or epistolary, which were regarded by those into whose hands they came as of divine origin and authority. By these they were communicated to others, and thus gradually they came to be universally recognized as the standard of faith and practice. These writings were all completed by the end of the first century, having proceeded from the pen of apostles, or of apostolical men; that is, men under the influence and guidance of the apostles. But there was no official determination of their number or character made at that early period. As Reuss tells us, "There is not the least doubt that the apostles, and, as a rule, the Christians of their time, held the law and the prophets to be divinely inspired, and therefore held the words of Scripture to be not the words of men, but the words of God."* This fact, indeed, is apparent on the face of the New Testament, and becomes the more certain the more carefully its pages are studied. And the notion of inspiration then held included all the elements of excellence and of absoluteness which have been given

* "History of the Canon," Eng. trans., p. 12.

to it in any later definitions. Now, it was just this notion of the inspiration of the *Old* Testament that came in time to be attached to the *New*. No central power that we know of regulated or controlled the circulation of the documents belonging to the early Church. But it is natural to suppose that Christian people would desire to possess authentic memorials of the wonderful life of Him whose name they bore, and copies of the letters written by His apostles; and neither the cost of manuscript copies nor the difficulty of communication between different parts of the Roman world was so great as has sometimes been supposed.

We have some remains of what were called the Apostolic Fathers, Clement of Rome, Polycarp of Smyrna, and Ignatius of Antioch, between the years 90 and 130, by which we learn that the writings of the apostles had not only extended beyond the narrow circle of their origin, but were already exercising a marked influence on the teaching. In them we find mention of certain Epistles of Paul, and also of the evangelic history and of certain words of Jesus, the two being commonly called the Gospel and the Epistle. In this appeal to written records is the fruitful germ of the deference subsequently paid to the New Testament writers. It is not contended that these Apostolic Fathers had a complete Canon in their hands. That may or may not have been the case. The recognition of the Canon was doubtless as gradual as its formation had been. All that we are concerned to establish is that these Fathers had New Testament authorities to which they referred as genuine and decisive. The Old Testament was already in their possession, and they had long been accustomed to use it in public and in private; but now they had something more, to wit, the Christian truth contained in Christ's life, whether conveyed orally or in writing, and the instructions of the apostles as given

either in epistles or the traditional arrangements they had made in the churches.

Passing from these fathers to their successors, the Apologists of the second century (from 130 to 180), we find explicit testimony to the existence of distinct parts of the sacred Canon. Papias refers to the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, to the first Epistles of John and of Peter, and to the Apocalypse of John. He is said indeed to have been, although bishop of Hieropolis, a weak-minded and garrulous old man, which may be the fact, but does not affect his testimony, for "weakness of intellect does not enable one to speak of books as existing which are not in existence." The author of the beautiful relic of antiquity known as the Epistle to Diognetus, refers distinctly to the Gospels as, along with the law and the prophets, a regular source of faith and instruction. He also refers, though less distinctly, to the apostles in the same way. From Justin Martyr, the first of the apologists, we learn that there were extant in his day memoirs written by the apostles and their companions, that these were called Gospels and were regarded as authoritative, and that it was a common custom in Christian congregations to read these memoirs on Sunday along with the Old Testament prophets. Living as he did only forty years after the death of the last apostle, his testimony is particularly valuable as proving that at least the first two Gospels were in his day in general circulation and use. As he is simply making a defensive argument against the calumnies under which Christians were suffering, he does not quote the Gospels by the titles in use among Christians, because that was not required; but he certainly does refer to these productions, and his testimony as that of a man of liberal culture who travelled far and wide to spread the truth, must have great weight. Contemporaneous with Justin is a document known as the Muratorian Fragment, first

published in 1740. It was found in the Ambrosian Library, at Milan, in a volume of Latin fragments which dates apparently from the eighth century. This one was copied from a MS. of much higher antiquity, the writer of which speaks of himself as a contemporary of Pius, bishop of Rome in the second century, and it is now admitted on all hands that the date is somewhere between 160 and 170 A.D. It is written in barbarous Latin, and is mutilated at both ends. But its scope is clear. It gives a list of the sacred writings which were then acknowledged in the churches. It begins with Luke, but calling him "the third," plainly shows that the earlier portion, which has been torn off, contained Matthew and Mark. After giving account of the Gospels and the Acts, it proceeds to enumerate thirteen epistles of Paul, nine of them addressed to churches and four to individuals. Then it mentions two epistles of John and the epistle of Jude, and also the Apocalypse of John. Thus it includes every book of the existing Canon, save the epistle to the Hebrews, the epistle of James, the first one of John and the first and second of Peter. Why these are omitted it is not easy to say, for it is certain that in his notice of John's Gospel, he quotes a passage taken from his first epistle, yet he does not mention it by name. The incomplete statement may be owing to the mutilation of the text, which seems to be made up of detached pieces. But whatever be the cause, the fact itself deducts but little from the value of this first catalogue of the sacred books of the New Covenant. Whoever the author was, he is not setting forth his own individual views, but stating what is the usage in his ecclesiastical sphere, naming the books which were received in the Catholic Church, and some of those (Ep. to the Laodiceans and another to the Alexandrians, etc.) which were rejected. It is true the document is in no sense official, but is simply the account

of a witness. But this fact does not derogate from its value as a trustworthy representation of the common opinion of believers of its day.

There are those who insist that if there be a Canon at all, it shall be one regularly drawn up by the apostles, and given to the world with their official sanction. But we answer, that this was not God's method in the composition of the Old Testament. Its constituent parts were given to the people from time to time, in each case with satisfactory testimonials of the authority of the narrator or prophet or singer, to speak in behalf of God. But when these were once sent forth, it was left to the Church in its own discretion to gather them into a roll, or a volume, as the complete disclosure of God's will. This was done, and that in a very satisfactory manner. We have the living oracles as the Jews received and still hold them, nor is there any reason to fear that anything has been omitted that ought to have been inserted, or that the book contains anything that has no right to be there. Why should any different mode of procedure be anticipated in the new economy? So far as appears, it has pleased God to pursue precisely the same course with the Greek Scriptures as with the Hebrew. The apostles and their companions (Mark and Luke, and the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews), were led, under divine direction, to execute their various writings, which were authenticated satisfactorily to their first receivers (as we infer from the words of Paul, "The salutation of me, Paul, with my own hand"—1 Cor. xvi. 21; "The salutation of me, Paul, with my own hand, which is the token in every epistle"—2 Thess. iii. 17), and then were sent abroad among the various bodies of believers, to make their way by force of their own intrinsic worth and validity. It was not at all necessary to their authority or usefulness that they should be collected into a volume, or

obtain the special imprimatur of some ecclesiastical assembly. Nor was such a notion thought of until after many centuries. In the early period, churches and church fathers were cited, not as authorities to say what should or should not be done, but as witnesses to declare what had been done, to bear testimony that, as a matter of fact, certain writings had been received as apostolic and inspired, and certain others had not been. It nowhere appears that the New Testament writers had the design of conveying to their readers a full statement of the Faith. Their works are, so to speak, casual and fragmentary, designed simply to meet an existing want, as it revealed itself in the circle of their activity. And yet, as we know, those writings, taken together, form a unique and symmetrical whole, from which no part could be withdrawn without impairing the unity and richness of the rest. This, of course, was not apparent at first. Experience, diversities of opinion, doctrinal errors, corruption of life, turned the attention of the churches more and more to the original depositories of saving truth; and partial collections of apostolic writings began to be formed. The Fragment of Muratori shows how far this movement had proceeded in his day. But in the course of the last quarter of the second century the matter took a wider and more general development. Here we find no less than five great witnesses to the determination of the Canon. (1). First is Irenæus, born in Asia Minor, and trained there under Polycarp, who was a pupil of the apostle John. He removed to Gaul, and became Bishop of Lyons, where he exerted a wide influence. He quotes as Scripture all our present Canon, save James, Jude, 3 John, and 2 Peter. (2). Clement of Alexandria was a man of varied training and extensive knowledge, and famous alike for his ability and for his position as head of the catechetical school of his city. He quotes

as Scripture all our Canon, save Philemon, James, 2 and 3 John, and 2 Peter; but besides these, gives his sanction to a number of writings now deemed apocryphal. (3). In the neighboring province of North Africa was Tertullian, an able and eloquent orator, notable for his fiery zeal. He quoted almost identically the same books as Clement, and with the same respect. (4). Contemporaneous with them was the old Latin version of the S.S., known as the *Itala*, which was made in North Africa, but two centuries afterward being superseded by Jerome's revision, called the Vulgate, only fragments of it now remain. This Old Latin version did not contain Hebrews, James, and 2 Peter, but otherwise was like the present Canon. (5). Besides this was a still older version, made in the far East, the *Syriac Peshitto*, which contained Hebrews, but omitted Jude, 2 and 3 John, 2 Peter, and the Apocalypse. Now, here are five witnesses, covering the greater part of the known world, from Lyons in Gaul, to Edessa near the Euphrates, and representing four or five of the great divisions of the Ante-Nicene Church, and they are all in substantial agreement as to the chief parts of the Canon. The Gospels, the Acts, and the Pauline Epistles are accepted by them as the work of apostolic men, as inspired of God, and as furnishing the rule of faith. Surely, the force of truth, some divine instinct, or the overruling hand of Providence, guided them to this remarkable unanimity. For no force was laid upon them, no external authority controlled them, but they were left to choose their course as seemed to them right. Yet living so far apart, and differing as they did in outward circumstances and inward characteristics, they still reached practically the same result—a result which, so far as its positive features are concerned, must be accepted. That is, the books which they all receive as divine, must be accepted by us in like manner. No valid, no

plausible reason can be assigned why we should distrust these concurring witnesses, and no explanation of their substantial agreement can be given, apart from the fact that they drew from a common source, viz., the first receivers of the inspired books.

Now, in regard to the books which these parties rejected, we have a full and clear statement in the words of Eusebius, the friend of Constantine, and the first of the long line of Church historians. He gives a catalogue of the writings of the New Testament, viz., the Gospels, the Acts, the (fourteen) Epistles of Paul, 1 John, 1 Peter, and the Apocalypse. These, he says, are the *Acknowledged* Books, received by all. Then he enumerates James, Jude, 2 Peter, and 2 and 3 John, as *Disputed* Books, which, although well known (and used) by most, were yet felt to be lacking in authority. Then he mentions a third class (*Spurious*), such as the Revelation of Peter, the Epistle of Barnabas, etc., which are pious and useful, but not canonical. To these he adds a fourth class, about which there was no dispute whatever, but they were to be set aside as worthless and impious. It is not necessary to trace the matter farther. As time went on, the settlement of vexed questions on the subject became more clear and harmonious. Less than half a century after Eusebius, we find the great Athanasius giving a catalogue which in all respects is the same as our own, and after a century all differences of opinion died out, and the whole Christian body was of one mind on the point. The veteran critic and scholar, Reuss of Strasburg, recounts the list made by Eusebius, and then says: "This division is certainly very far from being scientific; as a matter of theory and dogma it is even absurd." It is somewhat hard to see what room there is for science in settling a question of fact of the nature of this one, or how Eusebius lies open to reproach for pursuing the very course followed by all

the lights of the Church from the beginning. Nothing is more certain from all the evidence in the case than that individuals and churches in accepting any writing as divinely inspired, were governed by their conviction as to its origin. The only question they asked was: Did it come from men who were themselves apostles, or so associated with apostles as to be under their influence? And the fact of its reception by any number of churches was of weight only as it bore upon this point. In fact, for a thousand years there was no conciliar action in the matter. The provincial council of Laodicea (363 A.D.), which acted on the subject, only decreed that canonical books alone should be read in the churches, but did not determine what these were. Afterward at Carthage, in 397, through Augustine's influence, there was a decree which named the books, and limited their ecclesiastical use, but this was not repeated anywhere else, much less sanctioned by any act of an œcumenical body. The whole question was regarded as out of the domain of conciliar action. The appeal was always made to tradition, to usage, to antiquity, and not to any decree of any ecclesiastical body, large or small.

As to the Disputed Books, it does not appear that the doubt or hesitation in their case arose from the nature of their contents, but from circumstances which admitted of an adequate explanation and afterward received the same. Thus, the Epistle to the Hebrews was circulated without the name of its author, as it still is, and this fact, of course, made men chary of acknowledging its apostolical authority. The second and third Epistles of John were very short, were addressed each to an individual, and, therefore, might easily escape notice for a considerable time. The Epistle of James was addressed to the believers of the Diaspora, who were widely scattered, but were mainly found in the East, and so it would naturally

be a long time in coming to the knowledge of the Church in the West. The second Epistle of Peter and the Epistle of Jude were apparently directed to Jewish believers, and were full of Hebrew memories and allusions, and so might have drifted into corners where they escaped attention. But whether these explanations be sufficient or not, the existence of the *Antilegomena*, or Disputed Books, is not a thing to be regretted. Rather the fact stands out as an undeniable evidence that the formation of the Canon was not a hasty enterprise, undertaken without deliberation, and concluded without reason, but, on the contrary, was conducted with all conceivable care. Not every writing claiming to be from an apostle's hand was welcomed and forthwith admitted, but there was delay and investigation, and in some cases two centuries elapsed before the case was closed. But it may be added, that even if the result had been other than it actually was, and the entire body of disputed books had been dropped as uncanonical, while our loss would have been serious and greatly to be lamented, it would have been anything but fatal. The body of the faith would have remained the same; the creed would have lost none of its articles, and the ethics of the New Covenant would still have maintained their pure and lofty standard. But, blessed be God, we have not a mutilated Bible. The book contains all that it was intended to have. We have no reason to think that any inspired book was lost. The early believers were faithful to their high calling, and carefully preserved the precious deposit of living oracles committed to their hands, and oftentimes at sore risk and cost. Eusebius says that when he was young he saw, at Cesarea, under the persecution of Diocletian, the houses of Christians razed to the ground, and the sacred Scriptures consigned to the flames in the open market-place. The enemies of the truth were as quick then as in former

days to see the value of written documents in conserving the faith, and they made desperate efforts to destroy these title-deeds of the Christian hope. Not a few of the early disciples suffered death for refusing to deliver up their sacred books. Some, indeed, overcome by the terrors of a fierce persecution, did, in the hour of temptation, consent to surrender their treasures, but they bore ever afterward the odious name, *traditores*; and it was with the utmost difficulty that any of them could be received again into the communion of the Church, even after a long repentance and the most humbling confession of their fault. We may, therefore, well believe that the effort of Diocletian failed as entirely as did that of Antiochus Epiphanes, who, centuries before, sought to accomplish a similar purpose in respect to the sacred volume of the Jews. In neither case did threats and tortures succeed. Neither the Old Testament nor the New, nor any portion of them, was obliterated. We have all that our gracious God intended us to have—nothing more, nothing less.

Our existing Canon of the New Testament is, then, a complete whole, varied indeed in its parts, but all bound together in a harmonious unity, and it thoroughly merits the encomium which its chief penman pronounced upon the Old Testament: "Every Scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness; that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work." This admirable excellence is perceived whenever the book is faithfully studied; it is demonstrated by its influence in all the past upon individuals, families, and nations; it is shown yet more convincingly by comparison with any or all of the apocryphal writings. These are many and various. Not all of them have come down to us, but enough have survived to satisfy us that the early Church did not accept whatever offered

itself as apostolic and divine, but employed a wise and discriminating criticism, and was as distinctly guided from above in what it rejected as in what it adopted. There is a number of gospels intended to fill supposed gaps in the works of the four evangelists, but not one of them can for a moment stand a comparison with the canonical record. They are puerile in style and substance, make no addition to our real knowledge, and are every way worthless. The same is true of the Acts of Pilate, the Letters of Paul to Seneca, the Letter of Abgarus to Jesus, and of all the rest. It would seem as if they were allowed to be produced and to survive in order to furnish all coming time a convenient test by which to determine the distance between the genuine productions of an apostolic pen and those that are spurious. A similar remark may be made concerning other productions written in good faith, but of simply human origin, which yet, in more than one case, were temporarily mistaken for apostolic, and classed with the legitimate Scripture. Such are the Shepherd of Hermas, the Epistle of Barnabas, etc. These are not silly and superstitious like the apocryphal books, but serious, and having a definite purpose. Yet they are written on a low, human, earthly plane, without any definite grasp of revealed truth and wholly destitute of the intense spiritual power of the genuine Word. Hence it is not strange that after being for a time mixed up with the genuine accents of inspiration their true character became known, and they were quietly dropped from the position to which they had no claim, and now serve no purpose save that of showing how great is the difference between a religious teacher who writes in dependence upon his own resources and one who is under the guidance of the Holy Ghost. There is nothing in the whole range of antiquity which any competent authority would wish to add to the existing Canon, nothing which, if so added, would be anything

else than a drawback — something that had to be explained and apologized for.

It may then be said in conclusion, that the external evidence is fully corroborated by the internal, leaving us no room to doubt that the existing Canon of Scripture as recognized by Protestant Christendom is strictly accurate, having nothing superfluous and nothing lacking, but containing the whole mind of the Spirit so far as it has been revealed. God, having been pleased to make a revelation of Himself to our race and to inspire holy men to make an exact record of that revelation, has also seen fit in His wise and holy Providence to guard the transmission of it down through the ages so that it comes to us in all its original integrity, and we believe and are sure that we are not following cunningly-devised fables, but possess the living oracles of the living God. The external evidence and the internal combine to justify this conclusion in which the Church of God has calmly rested for centuries. From time to time portions of the Canon have been violently attacked, and the assailants often raised a shout of triumph, but the triumph was short. After the smoke had cleared away it was seen that the foundations of revealed truth had not suffered in the least, but only displayed anew their immovable solidity.