

IV.

THE INFLUENCE OF AUTHORITY IN MATTERS OF OPINION.*

1877.

1. MANY are the tricks of speech; and it has become almost a commonplace of our time to set up, in matters of opinion, an opposition between authority and truth, and to treat them as excluding one another. It would be about as reasonable to set up an opposition between butcher's meat and food. Commonplaces of this character are no better than expressions of a sentiment, which the understanding, betraying its trust, allows to pass unexamined because it flatters the prevailing fashion. For the fashion is to call in question, and to reject as needlessly irksome, all such rules of mental discipline as, within the sphere of opinion, require from us a circumspect consideration, according to the subject-matter, of the several kinds as well as degrees of evidence. These rules are troublesome rules; they sadly detract from the ease and slacken the rapidity of the journey towards our conclusions, and thus postpone the enjoyment of mental rest.

2. Sir Gilbert Lewis has done good service, which I hope rather than expect will be appreciated, in republishing the valuable work by his elder brother, Sir George, 'On the Influence of Authority in Matters of

* Reprinted from *The Nineteenth Century*, March 1877. The main argument is founded on the work of Sir G. C. Lewis, 'An Essay on the Influence of Authority in Matters of Opinion.' London, 1849; and 2nd edition, 1875.

Opinion.' It is perhaps the best monument of that learned, modest, most dispassionate, and most able man. The volume had become extremely rare, and could only be obtained at a high price. Yet, though the admirers were in earnest, the circle of them was very narrow. Only a few, a very few, hundred copies ever passed into the hands of the public. It appeared in 1849, at a time when comparative calm prevailed in the world of philosophy and speculation. The remarkable sobriety of the author, his abhorrence of paradox, his indifference to ornament, his rigidly conscientious handling, made it difficult for him to please the palate of the public, which even then required, as it now more exactly requires, highly seasoned food.

3. Still, this unpretending book, it seems, could not die. Its republication may probably make the work known to a new set of readers; and, as the students of such a book are ordinarily men who severally act upon the minds of others, it may, and I hope will, attain to an influence relatively wide. It must be owned that the volume contains a considerable amount of matter which would be more appropriately placed in a treatise on the Science of Politics. But the main argument is so important, that I am desirous to present a summary which may convey a fair conception of its contents, and invite to a direct examination. Nor will this be done in the spirit of a partisan; for I shall try to extend the conclusion of this weighty writer on a point of the utmost weight, affecting not the frame of his argument, but its application.

4. I begin, too, with stating a difference, though one of small moment. Sir George Lewis traces the origin of the word authority through the Latin *auctor*; and the account

he gives is that "an *auctor* meant the creator or originator of anything. . . . Hence any person who determines our belief is called an *auctor*. . . . As writers, particularly of history, were the authorities for facts, *auctor* came to mean a writer."* But the word *augeo* properly means to increase, to make to grow, not to create; † and, while it is plain that *auctor* means on the one hand maker or originator, and on the other hand voucher, surety, witness, I cannot but think that the last-named is the original sense, and the preceding one secondary. The proper idea is that of one who *adds*. In strictness, this must be adding to what existed before, as a witness adds to the thing his testimony about the thing; a surety, his own liability to the liability of the principal. From this original form the meaning passes on to a gradual creation, the creation of something that receives successive increment, as in "auctor frugum"; ‡ "generis nec Dardanus auctor." § If my view be sound, the use of the word author for writer is strictly correct, and belongs to the original sense. An "author" comes between us and the facts or ideas, and adds to them a *πίστις*, or ground of belief in his own assurance to us respecting them. And Dante is dealing with the word in its first intention when he says, addressing Virgil,

"Tu se'il mio maestro, e'l mio autore." ||

So he himself explains it in the *Convito* as "degno di fede e di ubbidienza;" "des Gehorsams und Glaubens würdig,"

* P. 6, note, edit. 1849, to which all references belong.

† Scheller cites Lucr. v. 323 and 389, as bearing the sense of creation, but they in no degree require it; and I think this interpretation of the word *auctor* has been, so to speak, reflected upon it from the known use of the derivative *authority*.

‡ Georg. i. 27.

§ Æn. iv. 365.

|| 'Inferno,' i. 83.

in the note of the King of Saxony to his translation of the Poem. But the secondary sense is that used in Milton :

“Thou art my father, thou my author, thou.” *

5. And hence we obtain the largest and clearest idea of “authority,” as that which comes between us and an object, and in relation to us adds something to the object which is extrinsic to it, which is apart from any examination of it by ourselves, but which forms a motive, of greater or less weight as the case may be, for belief or action respectively in their several spheres.

It is with authority for belief or opinion alone, not distinguishing the two, that the work before us deals. It leaves aside authority applicable to action, whether freely or otherwise, as that of the law, of the parent, of the military officer, physician, clergyman, or other professional or specially instructed persons. I shall presently take a portion of these topics into view.

6. Now, it would sound strangely in our ears were any one of the most distinguished dealers in commonplace, instead of proclaiming, “not authority, but truth,” to take for his text, “not examination, not inquiry, but truth.” We should at once reply that examination or inquiry was no more in conflict with truth than our road to London is in conflict with London. The cases are parallel. Inquiry is a road to truth, and authority is a road to truth. Identical in aim, diverse in means and in effect, but both resting on the same basis. Inquiry is the more normal, the more excellent way; but penury of time and faculty absolutely precludes the human being from obtaining, by this truly royal road, a sufficient stock of knowledge for

* ‘Paradise Lost,’ ii. 864.

the necessary action of life; and authority is the humble but useful substitute.

7. Nor is the distinction between them in any sense one of antagonism; on the contrary, there is, besides the oneness of their ultimate sanction, this notable affinity betwixt them: the knowledge, referable to action, which we obtain by inquiry, is altogether or commonly probable knowledge; and authority is probable knowledge too. Of course both the authority and the inquiry must be regulated by the laws that belong to their respective kinds. The rule for us, in whatever case, is one: to make the best practicable use of the best available means for thinking truly and acting rightly, using inquiry where we can, accepting authority where we cannot effectually use inquiry.

8. Having taken this general view of the region before us, I will now follow the guidance of Sir George Lewis, premising that he seems to aim at working definitions rather than such as are strictly scientific.

(a). His inquiry has no reference to matters of fact; and these he defines as "anything of which we obtain a conviction from our internal consciousness, or any individual event or phenomenon which is the object of sensation."*

(b). Disputed questions of fact pass into the region of matters of opinion. And, more largely, matters of opinion are "general propositions or theorems relating to laws of nature or mind, principles and rules of human conduct, future probabilities, deductions from hypotheses, and the like, *about which a doubt may reasonably exist.*"†

(c). Opinions may be entertained from compulsion, or from inducement of interest.‡ These, I should say, may

* P. 1.

† P. 3.

‡ P. 6.

conveniently be called authority improper ; but they rest upon authority proper, when embraced without reasoning because others, believed or assumed to be competent, entertain them.

(d). "A large proportion of the general opinions of mankind are derived merely from authority."* And the advice of competent judges has great influence in questions of practice. When truths have been discovered by original inquirers, and received by competent judges, it is principally by authority that they are accredited and diffused.† Such adoption cannot lead to an improvement of knowledge, or to discovery of new truths : "the utmost he can hope is to adopt the belief of those who, at the time, are least likely to be in error." We are, of course, to assume this proposition to apply to the cases where it is necessary or harmless to have some belief, and where there are not such patent grounds for doubt or question as to recommend that valuable though sometimes despised expedient, suspense of judgment.

9. In his second chapter, Sir George Lewis shows the great extent of the opinions founded upon authority. These are such as we derive from instruction in childhood, or from seniors, or from fashion. He shows the extremely limited power of inquiry by the working class ; and how even the well-informed rely chiefly on compendia and secondary authorities. He shows how, in strict truth, when we act upon conclusions of our own, for which the original reasons are no longer present to our minds, we become *authorities* to ourselves ; and the direct action of reason is as much ousted, as if we were acting on some authority extrinsic to us. Then there is the deference

* P. 7.

† P. 8.

shown, in the region of practice, to professional or specially instructed persons; or to friends having experience, which enables a man to discern grounds of belief invisible to the unpractised eye. In these matters we take into view the amount of attention given, the ability of the person, his responsibility, and his impartiality. In his third chapter, our author delivers, as he passes on, a remarkable *dictum* :

“That high degree of intellectual power which we call genius, and which the ancients attributed to the inspiration of the gods, is in itself inexplicable, and can only be judged by its effects. But some ray of that light is requisite in order to enable a person to be classed among the original teachers and guides of mankind.”*

Nor can I refuse the satisfaction of making another citation :

“The moral sentiments may be so ill directed as to deprave the judgment, even when the understanding is remarkably strong. Men of this sort may be *great*, but cannot be *wise*; for by wisdom we mean the power of judging when the intellectual and moral faculties are *both* in a sound state. Napoleon affords a striking instance of the corruption of the judgment in consequence of the misdirection of the moral sentiments.”†

10. The authority of the old philosophers as to ethical science‡ was much weakened by their dissensions; while§ “astronomy furnishes an example of a science as to which there has been a general agreement of its professors for more than a century.” Mesmerism, homœopathy, and phrenology are rather contemptuously dismissed as “mock sciences.”|| But the general description of pretenders is admirable:¶

* P. 30.

† P. 38.

‡ P. 44.

§ P. 43.

|| P. 51.

¶ P. 56.

"Nothing is more characteristic of the pretender to philosophy than his readiness to explain, without examination or reflection, all phenomena which may be presented to him. Doubt, hesitation, suspense of the judgment, inquiry before decision, balancing of apparently opposite facts, followed, perhaps, by a qualified and provisional opinion—all these are processes utterly foreign to his mind, and indicative, in his view, of nothing but weakness and ignorance."

Medicine has always been the favourite field of pretenders; and medical science (for he does not withhold the name) forms an important exception to the rule that "the physical are better ascertained than the moral sciences."*

11. Lewis also inquires what countries, as well as what persons or classes, are to be allowed to weigh in the matter of authority; † and finds, that we may justly confine the field of discussion to "the civilised nations of Europe," ‡ with the Greeks at their head, and the Romans as their pupils following them:

"They made the first great step from barbarism to scientific knowledge; which, perhaps, is more difficult, and more important, than any further advance which they left to be made by their successors."

He excludes not only barbarians, but Chinese, Hindoos, Persians, and Turks, on the ground of their want of progress "in political institutions and scientific knowledge," from the suffrage, so to speak, or the title to count in that consent which makes up authority.

12. In the light of these remarks, we may approach his general statement: §

* P. 57.

† P. 59.

‡ P. 60.

§ P. 50.

"In general, it may be said that the authority of the professors of any science is trustworthy in proportion as the points of agreement among them are numerous and important, and the points of difference few and unimportant."

"The opposition which is sometimes made between authority and reason rests on a confusion of thought." *

And this confusion is favoured partly by the fact that the mind, after the choice of its guide, becomes passive, partly by the use of the word authority, in certain cases, for coercive power. But—

"The choice of a guide is as much a matter of free determination as the adoption of an opinion on argumentative grounds." † He illustrates the position by reference to the case of a Roman Catholic. ‡

13. The illustration becomes most forcible when, among Roman Catholics of various colours, we choose the school which has now gained, whether finally or provisionally, the upper hand in the Latin Church. The determination to accept as the final rule of belief all declarations by the Pope, which the Pope himself may define to be *ex cathedrâ*, is as much an act of "private individual judgment" as if the determination were to follow Luther, or Wesley, or Swedenborg. I venture upon adding that, if this decision be taken lightly and without observance of the general rules which reasonably guide mankind in the search for truth, it may even be an use of private judgment in the highest degree licentious. The servant in the parable who wrapped his talent in a napkin, and thus (as it were) gave it away from his own use, exercised his private judgment just as much as the fellow-servant who

* P. 63.

† *Ibid.*

‡ P. 64.

employed it constantly and steadily, and obtained large increase from it. He used his private judgment as much, only he used it in a wrong direction; just as if a free citizen of this country were to repair to a country where slavery prevails, and there to sell himself into bondage.

14. The fourth chapter treats of "The Applicability of the Principle of Authority to Questions of Religion." And it begins with a brief description, which seems to belong to the general subject, and therefore to all of the earlier chapters. In it he shows how the authority of which he treats is not that of individuals only. Traditive systems grow up in a course of generations, and by collection, purgation, adjustment, and enlargement or advance, acquire those kinds and degrees of adhesion according to which "a trustworthy authority may at length be formed, to which a person uninformed on the subject may reasonably defer." * He proceeds:

"This description, however, is not applicable to religion, or at least is only applicable to it within certain limits."

15. Now, thus far I have sat at the feet of Gamaliel: I must, however, take upon myself to canvass the limits within which the principle of authority is legitimately applicable to the choice of a religion.

The "at least" of the sentence I have quoted spans a gulf of a breadth immeasurable. The assertion without "at least" is that the doctrine of authority has no application to religion. But, with the pacifying intervention of this useful mediator, the proposition only asserts that the application of it is limited and conditional. To this assertion there may be objectors; but surely no other than such as embrace, in all its extravagance, as a rule of belief

* P. 67.

and action for the human being, the rule that he is to be *prout cadaver, vel baculus in manu ambulantis*. Short of this, there would not be on the believing or affirmative side of the gulf a single opponent. Vaticanism, for example, might point out that there are many Papal utterances beyond the line of the obligatory definition, many pious opinions broadly distinguished from articles of faith, many propositions belonging to the subject-matter of religion which may be freely affirmed or denied without peril. Such would be its theory; and even in its practice it does not and cannot wholly shut out the immediate action of the mind on the object, or the impressions or conclusions which may follow from the theory, and which are things distinct from it.

16. It is, however, clear upon the whole, that the "at least," in the foregoing proposition really sets aside the unqualified form which immediately precedes it, and that the candour of the author's mind led him to conclude that the principle of authority was truly applicable to the subject of religion, "within certain limits."

17. What those limits are, he presently proceeds to explain.

(a). He conceives, in the first place, that "all nations have agreed in the substantial recognition of a divine power, superhuman and imperceptible by our senses."* Nearly all human opinion, and all the human opinion entitled to weight, has concurred in this affirmation.

(b). Secondly, he conceives that the whole civilised or authoritative world has also agreed in the acceptance of Christianity.

* P. 69.

“Christendom includes the entire civilised world; that is to say all nations whose agreement on a matter of opinion has any real weight or authority.”*

(c). This, however, he limits to the acceptance of “some form of the Christian religion.” He proceeds to show that the nations are not agreed in the acceptance of a particular Church; that the rule of Vincentius, *quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus*, is incapable of a strictly literal application; and generally “there is no consent of competent judges over the civilised world. Inconsistent and opposite forms of Christianity continue to exist side by side.” †

(d). He has still, however, another very important concession to make to particular Churches. The authority of the Church of England (and, if we understand him right, of every Church) is limited to its own members. So limited, he thinks Hooker is right in considering it to be “more competent, in a corporate capacity, to decide doubtful questions than any of its individual members.”

18. The candour, acumen, breadth, and attainments of Lewis give a great weight to the convictions he has thus expressed. They may be summed up in few words as follows:

(a). The consent of mankind binds us in reason to acknowledge the being of God.

(b). The consent of civilised mankind similarly binds us to the acceptance of Christianity.

(c). The details of Christianity are contested; but in doubtful questions the Church, and, *e.g.*, the Church of England at large with respect to its own members, is more competent than they are individually; and the

* P. 69.

† P. 97.

business and duty of a reasonable man, so far as in these matters he is bound to have an opinion, is to follow the best opinion.

19. At the same time I do not suppose that our author would have placed the obligation implied by the third proposition on a level, in point of stringency, with that of the two former. He would, I presume, have said (in technical language), a readiness of the individual to submit himself was in this case of imperfect, but in those of perfect obligation.

20. Nor, we are safe in supposing, would he have held it a duty to know all that had been considered and determined by a Church, or to refrain from any testing inquiries; but only to have practical dealings with what offered itself to the mind in the course of Providence and of duty, and to conduct inquiry according to the true laws of reason.

21. I am inclined to think that Hooker has placed the doctrine of submission in matter of opinion to a local or special Church higher than, if he had had the experience of the last three centuries to assist him, he would have thought safe; and that Lewis, who had not a particle of egoism or self-assertion to sharpen unduly his critical faculty, may in this remarkable instance have been to a limited extent amiably misled by deference to a great writer.

22. On the other hand, I shall endeavour to show ground for supposing that, on the premisses which sustain the first two propositions, we ought to widen the conclusions at which Lewis has arrived; and this not so much upon ecclesiastical principles, in obedience to the authority either of a particular Church, or of the Church at large, *quâ* Church, as upon philosophical principles, in deference

to that general sense of mankind, which in such matters is entitled to claim authority. I take my departure, however, from the standing-ground of the two propositions, and do not go behind them, or argue with such as contend, in opposition to Lewis, that there is no just authority of consent in existence with respect either to the existence of God, or the acceptance of the Christian religion.

23. In the first place, belief in God surely implies much more than that He is superhuman and imperceptible. It seems to involve, as a general rule, the following particulars, which Lewis has not specified, but may by no means have intended to exclude.

(a). That He is conceived of as possessing in Himself all attributes whatsoever which conduce to excellence, and these in a degree indefinitely beyond the power of the human mind to measure.

(b). Over and above what He is in Himself, He is conceived of as standing in certain relations to us; as carrying on a moral government of the world. He is held to prescribe and favour what is right; to forbid and regard with displeasure what is wrong; and to dispose the courses of events in such a way that, in general and upon the whole, there is a tendency of virtue to bring satisfaction and happiness, and of vice to entail the reverse of these, even when appearances, and external advantages, might not convey such an indication.

(c). The same wide consent of mankind, which sustains belief in a God, and invests Him with a certain character, has everywhere perceptibly, though variably and sometimes with a great vagueness of outline, carried the sphere of the moral government which it assigns to Him beyond the limits of the visible world. In that larger region,

though it lie beyond the scope of our present narrow view, the belief of theistical mankind has been, that the laws of this moral government would be more clearly developed, and the normal relation between good and evil, and between their respective consequences, fully established.

(d). Along, therefore, with belief in a God we have to register the acknowledgment of another truth, the doctrine of a future state of man, which has had a not less ample acceptance in all the quarters from whence the elements of authority can be drawn; and has, indeed, in the darkest periods and places of religion, been found difficult to eradicate, even when the Divine Idea had been so broken up and degraded, as to seem divested of all its most splendid attributes.

24. In the second place, I come to the proposition of Sir George Lewis, that the acceptance of Christianity is required of us by a scientific application of the principle of authority, but without any reference to this or that particular form, or tenet, of the religion.

But as we found, in the prior instance of simple theism, that the authority of consent would carry us much beyond the acknowledgment of a disembodied abstraction, so, upon examining the case of Christianity, we shall find that what has been handed down to us under that name as part of the common knowledge and common patrimony of men is not a bare skeleton, but is instinct with vital warmth from a centre, and has the character, notwithstanding all the dissensions that prevail, of a living and working system not without the most essential features of an unity.

This I shall endeavour to show as to the following points:

- (a). The doctrine of Revelation.
- (b). The use of Sacraments.
- (c). The Christian Ethics.
- (d). The Creed.
- (e). The doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation.

25. Regarded historically, believers in Christ, casting anchor, so to speak, in an older dispensation, have uniformly acknowledged that God had "at sundry times and in divers manners"* made Himself known to the rational mind of man by a special communication or inspiration, over and above that knowledge of Himself which He had imparted by the books of nature and of life or experience. And this finally in the Gospel. They therefore have held themselves to be in possession of a special treasure of divine knowledge, communicated in a manner which carried with it a peculiar certainty; and such a belief, called the belief in *inspiration*, and pervading the whole of Christendom from the very first, is of itself a material amplification of the idea conveyed by the mere name of Christianity.

26. Next, there is a similar universality of Christian testimony in favour of the use of certain rites called Sacraments, as essentially belonging to, and marking out to view, the Christian scheme. I have nothing here to do with the question whether the Christian Sacraments are two or seven, or any other number in particular; or whether, as was suggested by Bishop Pecoock in conformity with St. Augustine and others, the word be in itself susceptible of even a wider application. Nor again with the various bodies of separatists who at different times have rejected infant baptism. The fact that, re-

* Heb. i. 1,

jecting the catholic and immemorial practice of baptism in infancy, they should still have retained the rite, renders them even stronger witnesses in its favour than they would have been if they had agreed as to the proper season of administration.

27. Again, it is to be observed that the sacraments have not been held as bare signs. Even the Scotch early Reformers, who may be said to represent a kind of *ultima Thule* in the opinions of the day, did "utterly damn" those who thus held. They have been deemed, according to the Anglican definition, to be "outward and visible signs of an inward and spiritual grace." When the exact relation of the sign to the thing signified comes to be considered, then indeed no inconsiderable body of differences comes into view, and the argument of consent can hardly be pressed within the definitions of our author. But up to that point it is strictly applicable. The very limited exception of a society founded among the English more than sixteen hundred years after Christ, scarcely embracing a thousandth part even of that race, and unable to quote by way of precedent more than a handful of dubious individual cases in all history, cannot, however respectable on social grounds, constitute an appreciable deduction from the weight of the Christian testimony. It could hardly be taken into account if it had, which it has not, at any time developed into a theology that basis of sentiment on which it mainly reposes.

28. Thirdly, the entire breadth of the Christian consent sustains a system of morality which is no less distinctive of the Gospel than is its doctrine.

Lewis has nowhere applied to morality the limitations

* Barclay's 'Apology,' Prop. xii. Objection 6.

to which he considered that religion must submit before it could take the benefit of the scientific principle of authority. He appears to hold that morality enjoys authority in a manner substantially the same as other established knowledge. It is plain that the authority of consent tells in its behalf more widely than in behalf of Christianity. Not, however, as to any complete code, for here too we have to contend with something of the same difficulty, arising from diversity about particulars, as in the case of Christian doctrine; but as to this great and broad proposition, that there exists a law of duty, what Sophocles called a *ὑπέκτους νόμος*, binding man ~~and~~ man. We find abundant evidence of this in a multitude of quarters beyond the precinct of Divine Revelation: in the various systems of religion, especially as they were projected by their founders, for example in that of Mahomet; in the provisions of public law, in the works of many philosophers, in primitive manners as they are developed by the monuments of Egypt, or, if not more fully yet less conventionally, by the poems of Homer.

29. All these were with great variation, both as to the behaviour enjoined, and as to the persons towards whom such behaviour was binding. But the Christian morality; gathering together the scattered fragments, and building them into a great temple of Duty, was a new thing as a whole, though in respect to its basis, and to the acknowledgment and even the practice of its parts disjointedly, it was able to call in the aid of non-christian and pre-christian testimony. The culmination and perfection of the Christian morality was found in that high and severe doctrine of marriage, against which, we may confidently anticipate, and almost venture to predict, that the anti-christian spirit will direct its first great attack, encouraged

by those preliminary operations in the legislative recognition of divorce which have already, from a variety of ill-omened causes, found a place upon our own, as well as upon other statute-books.

30. Some have been bold enough to say that the wide recognition, at the present day, of ethical doctrines in practical forms is due not to Christianity, but to the progress of civilisation. In answer to them, I will only halt for a moment, to ask the question how it came that the Greek and, in its turn, the Roman civilisation, each advancing to so great a height, did not similarly elevate the moral standards. And I shall by anticipation put in a *caveat* against any attempt to reply merely by exhibiting here and there an unit picked out of the philosophic schools, or the ideal pictures which may be found in the writings of a tragedian; pictures which have no more to do with the practical life of contemporary Greece, than have the representations of the Virgin and the Child, so much admired in our galleries, with the lives and characters of those who look on them, or in most instances of those who painted them.

31. A comparison between Epictetus and Paley, or between Aristotle and Escobar, would be curious, but would not touch the point. I do not inquire how low some Christian may have descended, or how high some heathen may have risen, in theory, any more than in practice. When I speak of the morality of a religion, I mean the principles and practices for which it has obtained the assent of the mind and heart of man; which it has incorporated into the acknowledged and standing code of its professors; which it has exhibited in the traditional practices, sometimes of the generality, sometimes only of the best. But this is a large subject, and lies apart. My

present argument is only with those who, like Sir George Lewis, hold that Christianity lies within the true scope of the principle of authority, but do not develop the phrase Christianity into its specific meanings.

32. To such it may be fairly put that under this name of Christianity we are to understand something that has some sort of claims and sanctions peculiarly its own; for it is not religion only, but Christian religion, which comes to us accredited by legitimate authority. Now I hope to obtain a general assent when I contend that Christianity can have no exclusive or preferential claim upon us, unless that, which distinguishes it as a religion, has some proportionate representation in the sphere of morality. In its ultimate, general, and permanent effects upon morality, largely understood, the test of the value of a religion is to be found; and if mankind, in its most enlightened portions, has lent the weight of its authority to Christianity, we must needs understand the word to carry and include some moral elements due and peculiar to the religious system.

33. And it is not difficult to sketch in outline some at least of the features which give speciality to Christian morals, without disturbing their relation to the general, and especially the best, non-Christian morality of mankind. First and foremost, they are founded on the character and pattern of a Person, even more, if possible, than on his words. In Him they recognise the standard of consummate and divine perfection. Secondly, they draw all forms of duty, to God, to men, and to ourselves, from one and the same source. Thirdly, they are to be practised towards all men alike, independently of station or race, or even life or creed. Fourthly, they are meant and fitted for all men equally to hold; and their most

profound vitality, if not their largest and most varied development, is within the reach of the lowly and uneducated, in whose minds and hearts it has, for the most part, fewer and less formidable barriers to surmount, or "strongholds," in the Apostle's language, to cast down.

34. Fifthly, the Christian law has placed the relation of man and woman, as such, in the great institution of marriage, and the provision for the continuance, through the family, of the species, upon such a footing as is nowhere else to be found. I do not say that this is not a restriction of a primitive law; but, if so, it was one the strain of which was found too great for those to whom it was given to bear. This law, with all its restraints of kin, of unity, and of perpetuity, is perhaps the subtlest, as well as the most powerful, of all the social instruments which the Almighty has put into use for the education of the race; and it is one, I am firmly persuaded, which no self-acting force, no considerations of policy, will ever be able to uphold in modern societies, when it shall have been severed from its authoritative source.

35. I will not dwell in detail on the mode in which the Gospel treats the law of love, the law of purity, or that which is perhaps most peculiar to it, the law of pain; but will be content with saying, sixthly and lastly, that Christian morals, as a whole—as an entire system covering the whole life, nature, and experience of man—stand broadly distinguished by their rich, complete, and searching character from other forms of moral teaching now extant in the world. The limitation implied in these last words has been introduced simply because it would be inconvenient on this occasion to examine whether, and in what respects, the Christian morals exhibit a reproduc-

tion of a primitive law once in force among the whole or a portion of mankind.

36. It seems, then, that, if the argument of authority, or consent, be available on behalf of Christianity, we cannot do otherwise than include in the scheme thus recommended a peculiar body of moral teaching, together with the notions of an inspired origin, and of certain outward or sacramental rites, universal, perpetual, and inseparable from the system to which they are attached.

37. I now proceed a step further; and contend that this Christianity must in reason be understood to include a doctrinal, as well as a moral and a symbolical system. I am not so desirous to fix the exact particulars of that doctrinal system, as to show that, when we speak of Christianity as having received the favourable verdict of the portion of mankind alone or best qualified to judge in such a matter, we do not mean the mere acknowledgment of a name, but we mean, along with other things, the acceptance of a body of truths which have for their centre the person and work of Christ. This body of truths has its foremost expression in the Creed known as that of the Apostles, and in a document of greater precision and development and of equal and more formal authority—the Creed of Constantinople commonly called the Nicene Creed. If the authority of civilised and intellectual man be available on behalf of something that we agree to call Christianity, my contention is that it is likewise available for these two great historic documents. We cannot reasonably make any sensible deduction from the weight of the propounding authority when, in the formula of consent, for the word Christianity we substitute the Creed of the Apostles, together with the Nicene Creed.

38. The human mind (I have said) is accustomed to play tricks with itself in every form; and one of the forms, in which it most frequently resorts to this operation, is when it attenuates the labour of thought, and evades the responsibility of definite decision, by the adoption of a general word that we purposely keep undefined to our own consciousness. So men admire the British Constitution without knowing or inquiring what it is, and profess Christianity but decline to say or think what it means. In such cases the general word, instead of indicating, like the title of an author's works, a multitude of particulars, becomes a blind, which, on the one hand, excludes knowledge, and, on the other, leaves us imbued with the notion that we possess it.

39. And my contention is that, whatever be the momentary fashion of the day in which we live, that same tradition and testimony of the ages, which commends Christianity to us, has not been a chimera or a chameleon, but has had from the first, up to a certain point of development, one substantially definite meaning for the word, a meaning of mental as well as moral significance; and has, as a matter of history, expressed this meaning in the Creeds. This Christianity has shed off from it, on this side and on that, after debate and scrutiny, and furthermore after doubt and even sometimes convulsion, all the conceptions irreconcilably hostile to its own essence, by a standing provision as normal as are the reparatory processes of material nature; and has been handed on continuously in uniformity of life, though not, it may be, in uniformity of health. So that reason requires us, when we speak of Christianity, to expound the phrase agreeably to history, if we mean to claim on its behalf the authority of civilised man, since it is to the expounded

phrase, and not the bare shell, that that authority attaches. It is in this sense what the visible Church also claims to be, a city set on a hill; not, indeed, a city within walls that can neither grow nor dwindle, but yet a city widely spread, with a fixed heart and centre, if with a fluctuating outline; a mass alike unchangeable, perceptible, and also determinate, not absolutely or mathematically, but in a degree sufficient for its providential purpose in the education of mankind. Of this mass, compounded of tenets, moral laws, and institutions, the core, so far as tenets are concerned, is exhibited in the Creeds.

40. If I have not named the Athanasian Creed as standing in the same category, it is not because its direct doctrinal statements have received an inferior acceptance from the students of Christian theology, but because it has not been, in at all the same sense, an instrument either of Christian profession or of Christian instruction.

If I do not dwell upon the difference between the East and the West in respect to what is called the Double Procession, it is because both parties are agreed that the variance of form does not oblige us to assert a difference of meaning. If I do not lay stress on those dogmatic distinctions among Christian communities of the East, which cause some of them to be placed in the class of heretical bodies, it is because, so far as I can understand, those differences seem to rest in the region of verbal expression, much more than to take effect in the practical conceptions of religion. If I pass lightly by the fact that large bodies of Protestants do not formally recognise the Creeds as documents, it is because I apprehend their objection not to lie against the contents, but only against the recognition, so that they continue available as witnesses to the substance which the documents enshrine.

41. Again, if I do not attach importance to the want of absolute coherency between the terminology of some of the early Fathers and the final expression of doctrine adopted by the Councils and sealed by the permanent assent of the Catholic Church, it is because I conceive such Fathers to have spoken without scientific precision in matters where human rashness and conceit had not yet created a necessity for scientific discussion and decision, and for the selection, and an authoritative sealing and stamping, of such phrases as seemed, upon the whole, the best and safest to indicate, rather than express, unfathomable verities; on which our hands indeed (so to speak) may lay effectual hold, but which our arms are totally unable to embrace. If I do not expatiate upon the undoubted truth that the recitals of the Creeds themselves are so largely those of fact rather than pure dogma, it is because the circumstance is no more than a normal result of a religious system founded upon a living Person, rather than an abstract conception.

42. It was profoundly observed by Möhler, in his *Symbolik*, that the controversies of the sixteenth century had been controversies concerning the human, not the divine, side of Christianity. Our forefathers, in the earlier ages of the Church, had fought and won for us the battles in which the question lay between safe and unsafe, adequate and inadequate, conceptions of the Divine Object of worship. They sowed, and we reap; they suffered, and we enjoy. But the primitive Creeds, which have now, not less than heretofore, their great office to fulfil, naturally belong to that supreme province, that theology proper, upon which, among the great body of Christians, neither the din of debate, nor the pain of doubt, is now or has for many ages been sensible.

43. New ranges of controversy have been opened, lying in lower though still elevated regions. They have turned on the condition of man apart from the Gospel, the mode of his approach to God, the reflection of his new state in his consciousness, his relation to the Church, his relation to the saints, his existence after death. To the common view, it is rather the points which at any given time are most contested, than those which lie deepest in the system, that are tenaciously held, and, because tenaciously held, are placed in the first rank of dignity. This is a dislocation of the natural order of appreciation, but it is in great part due to the fact that the propositions of the Creeds are taken for granted among us. For the modern mind, we may use a translation of language.

44. We will now say no more of the Creeds; but urge that that authority of general consent, which presses upon us the claims of Christianity, means by the phrase a system founded on the doctrines of the Holy Trinity and the incarnation of our Lord. All notions opposed to those doctrines were, in early times, successively put upon their trial, and decisively, though not always easily, ejected from the great idea of the Christian revelation. Since the time of the two Socini, a different conception of the Deity and of redemption, which has counted among its adherents men remarkable for ability and character, has just been able to maintain a fluctuating and generally rather feeble existence. Its note of dissonance has been so slightly audible in the great and solemn concert of the ancient belief, that, like the deviations of the first four centuries, it can make no appreciable breach in, or deduction from, the authority which vindicates for these great conceptions the central seat in the Christian system.

45. Here I break off. Desirous to renounce illusions,

and to eschew the indulgence of any private partiality, I should hesitate to ask for the inclusion of any more particular or complete conception of Christianity in that use of the phrase which, according to the reasoning of Lewis, is entitled to the same benefit from the principle of authority, as established truths of other sciences. I should regret to strain the argument; and am content to say that the Christianity which claims our obedience is a Christianity inspired, sacramental, ethical, embodied in certain great historic documents, involving certain profoundly powerful and operative doctrinal conceptions. A great mass and momentum of authority may be pleaded for much that lies beyond the outline I have drawn. Nearly half the Christian world adopts the entire Roman system. Throwing in the Eastern Churches, nearly three-fourths of it agree in certain usages or tenets, such as the invocation of saints, and some kind, not uniform, of religious devotion towards images. This large proportion is yet further swelled by the accession of the Anglican family of Churches, in regard to the framework of the visible Church or polity of Christians, and to those other points by which they are thought by many to savour more of the unreformed scheme of Christianity than the reformed. But all these are matters on which a large section of the Christian world, amounting to perhaps a sixth of the whole, and composed of the many active bodies of evangelical Protestants, introduce so large an element of dissent, that although authority by no means quits the field, yet it calls in the aid of reasoning to decide the day, inasmuch as nothing short of the general consent approaching to universality, or, as it has been called, to moral unanimity, can dispose of the case without that aid.

46. The sphere of religion is wide and diversified; and authority, in this region, stands as a hierarchy, constituted in degrees and orders, with many subaltern shades of diversity. But it is broadly distinguished from a *stratarchy*, from the corps of officers in an army, where an obedience both immediate and absolute is due from the private soldier, and from every successive grade, to a superior, till the command be reversed from above; and there is not granted to the inferior even that bare initiative of redress, which is implied in a right of appeal.

47. The species of authority with which we have been dealing, as endowed, under the laws of our rational being, with a binding force, may be called, for convenience, the major authority. Of that minor authority, which may still constitute a great element in rational discussion, and which admits great diversity of degree, we have a good instance in a remarkable passage, which was quoted by Dr. Newman in one of his controversial works on behalf of the English Church,* from Bishop Van Mildert:

“If a candid investigation be made of the points generally agreed upon by the Church Universal, it will probably be found that at no period of its history has any fundamental or essential truth of the Gospel been authoritatively disowned. . . . As far as the Church Catholic can be deemed responsible, the substance of sound doctrine still remains undestroyed at least, if not unimpaired. Let us take, for instance, those articles of faith, which have already been shown to be essential to the Christian covenant: the doctrines of the Trinity, of our Lord's Divinity and Incarnation, of his Atonement and Intercession, of our Sanctification by the Holy Spirit, of the terms of acceptance, and the Ordinances of the Christian Sacraments and Priesthood. At what period of the Church have these doctrines, or either of them, been by any public act disowned or called in question?”

* ‘Lectures on the Prophetic Office of the Church,’ p. 253, from Bishop Van Mildert's Bampton Lectures, viii.

Only the length of the passage forbids my adding to the citation.

48. Although, then, authority loses its commanding position when the great volume of human consent is broken into leaves or sections, we are not to infer that it is reduced to zero. Admitting that, while the Christian world is wonderfully agreed on the central verities of faith, and still more widely on those of morals, its many fractions are severed in relation to matters of grave import, I would still contend that the authority of each of those fractions is not indeed final, but yet real and weighty for those who belong to it, and they ought not to depart, except upon serious and humble examination, as well as clear conviction, from the religion they have been brought up to profess, even though non-christian; for it is the school of character and belief, in which Providence has placed them. Even though non-christian; and even while I follow Lewis in urging that the undivided authority of civilised and progressive man demands of us the acceptance of Christianity. For even the acceptance of such authority is a moral act, and cannot be performed without certain operations both of the mind and of the heart. Suppose that as a Hindoo or Mahometan, having studied history, I am moved by the argument of Lewis to embrace Christianity, I must still learn what it is I accept, and the very assent to such an argument requires time and implies a mental process. Nothing is more rash, I had almost said more shocking, than levity or irreverence in the change of religion; and this levity, rashness, and irreverence may be exhibited even in the act of submission to authority when clothed in its most extravagant and exaggerated form.

49. Although I am persuaded that the substance of Lewis's work is unassailable, I am not insensible to some

defects in its form. I have noticed already that a large portion of it seems to belong to a work on politics. It is oddly annexed to the main argument, for in politics authority is coercive; and nothing, perhaps, has more tended to confuse the public mind as to that authority which is both moral and graduated, than the fact that we are chiefly familiar with an authority which, as towards the individual, is both absolute and compulsory. Next to this authority of the State, we are accustomed to the idea of parental authority. In it the two great elements are mingled; but there is too great a tendency on the part of parents, and that not seldom found in conjunction with strong affection, to give prominence to the coercive aspect. Our author would have done us a further service, had he laid out with clearness, and even sharpness, the several kinds of authority; for the region which he traverses is occupied by a garrison of jealous and self-interested fallacies, always in arms against the intrusion of those sober truths which bring many a catastrophe upon our castles of conceit. I will endeavour in conclusion to present a succinct outline of the case.

50. Be it observed, then, that authority claims a legitimate place in the province of opinion, not as a bar to truth, but as a guarantee for it; not as an absolute guarantee, but only when it is as the best that may be had; not in preference to personal inquiry reaching up to the sources, but as the proper substitute in the multitude of instances where this is impracticable. Authority, rightly understood, has a substantial meaning: in that meaning, it is not at variance or in competition either with truth, or with private inquiry and private judgment. It is a crutch, rather than a leg; but the natural energy of the leg is limited, and, when the leg cannot work, the crutch may.

51. Further, the fact to which we ought to be alive, but for the most part are not, is that the whole human family, and the best and highest races of it, and the best and highest minds of those races, are to a great extent upon crutches, the crutches which authority has lent them. Even in the days of Bacon, even in the days of Dante, when knowledge, as the word is commonly understood, was so limited that some elect minds of uncommon capacity and vigour could grasp the whole mass of it, they still depended largely upon authority. For that aggregate of knowledge, which they were able to grasp, was but book-knowledge, and not source-knowledge. It was to a great extent not knowledge of subjects, but of what specially qualified men had said upon subjects. As we now stand, no individual man holds or can hold that relation to universal knowledge, which was held by Dante, or by Bacon, or by Leibnitz. A few subjects, in most cases a very few indeed, are or can be known in themselves by direct and immediate study; a larger number by an immediate knowledge of what writers, or the most accredited writers, have said upon them; the largest number by far only from indirect accounts, of as it were rumours, of the results which writers and students have attained.

“Ad nos vix tenuis famæ perlabitur aura.”

52. It seems, however, safe to say that the largest part even of civilised nations, in the greater proportion of the subjects that pass through the mind, or touch the course of common action, have not even this, but have only a vague unverified impression that the multitude, or the best, think so and so, and that they had better act and think accordingly. To some this may be an unwelcome announcement. The fact of their ignorance, and its burden, they

have borne in patience ; but it is less easy to bear equably the discovery how great that burden is.

53. Authority, in matters of opinion, divides itself (say) into three principal classes. There is the authority of witnesses. They testify to matters of fact : the judgment upon these is commonly thought not always easy ; but this testimony is always the substitution of the faculties of others for our own, which, taken largely, constitutes the essence of authority. This is the kind which we justly admit with the smallest jealousy. Yet not always : one man admits, another refuses, the authority of a sea-captain and a sailor or two (repeated from time to time), on the existence of the sea-serpent.

54. Then there is the authority of judges. To such authority we have constantly to submit. And this too is done for the most part willingly ; but unwillingly, as soon as we are told what we have been about. These judges sometimes supply us with opinions upon facts, sometimes with facts themselves. The results, in pure science, are accepted by us as facts ; but on the methods by which they are reached, the mass, even of intelligent and cultivated men, are not competently informed. Judgments on difficult questions of finance are made into compulsory laws, in parliaments where only one man in a score, possibly no more than one in a hundred, thoroughly comprehends them. All kinds of professional advice belong to this order in the classification of authorities.

55. But, thirdly, as Lewis has observed with much acuteness, we are in the constant habit of following yet another kind of authority, the authority of ourselves. In very many cases, where we have reached certain results by our own inquiries, the process and the evidence have been forgotten, and are no longer present to the mind at times

when we are called upon to act; they are laid aside as no longer necessary; we are satisfied with the knowledge that we acquired at a former time. We now hold to the conclusion, not remembering accurately its warrant, but remembering only that we once decided that it had a warrant. In its essence, this is acting upon authority. From this sort of action upon authority I believe no man of active life, however tenacious be his memory, can escape. And no man, who is content to act on this kind of authority, is entitled to object in principle to acting on other kinds. That I myself am the authority for myself is only an accident of the case. It would be more, could I lay down the dogma that an inquiry by me is better and more conclusive than an inquiry by others. We are bound to act on the best presumption, whether that presumption happens to rest on something done by others, or on something we have done ourselves.

56. While the naked exhibition of the amount of guidance found for us by authority is certainly unflattering, it has a moral use in the inculcation of much humility. It also offers to the understanding a subject of profound and wondering contemplation, by revealing to us, in measureless extent, the law of human interdependence, which again should have its moral use in deepening the sense of the brotherhood of man.

57. A general revolt, then, against authority, even in matters of opinion, is a childish or anile superstition, not to be excused by the pretext that it is only due to the love of freedom cherished in excess. The love of freedom is an essential principle of healthy human action, but is only one of its essential principles. Such a superstition, due only to excess in the love of freedom, may remind us that we should be burned to cinders were the earth capable of

imitating its wayward denizens, and indulging itself only in an excess of the centripetal force. We may indeed allow that, when personal inquiry has been thorough, unbiassed, and entire, it seems a violation of natural law to say that the inquirer should put it aside in deference to others, even of presumably superior qualification. Here there enters into the case a kind of sacred right of insurrection, essential as a condition of human progress. But the number of the cases in which a man can be sure that his own inquiry fulfils these conditions is comparatively insignificant. Whenever it falls short of fulfilling them, what may be called the subjective speciality of duty disappears; there remains only the paramount law of allegiance to objective truth, and that law, commonly dealing with probable evidence, binds us to take not that evidence with which we ourselves have most to do, but that which, whether our own or not, offers the smallest among the several likelihoods of error. The common cases of opposition lie not between authority and reasonable conviction, but between authority and fancy; authority and lame, or weak, or hasty, or shallow, processes of the mind; authority and sheer self-conceit or headstrong or indolent self-love.

58. There is something noble in a jealousy of authority, when the intention is to substitute for it a strong persistent course of mental labour. Such labour involves sacrifice, and sacrifice can dignify much error. But unhappily the rejection of authority is too often a cover for indolence as well as wantonness of mind, and the rejection of solid and venerable authority is avenged by lapse into the most ignoble servitudes. Those who think lightly of the testimony of the ages, the tradition of their race, which at all events keeps them in communion with it,

are often found the slaves of Mr. A or Mr. B, of their newspaper or of their club. In a time of much mental movement, men are apt to think that it must be right with them, provided only that they move; and they are slow to distinguish between progress, and what is running to and fro. If it be a glory of the age to have discovered the unsuspected width of the sway of law in external nature, let it crown the exploit by cultivating a severer study, than is commonly in use, of the law weighty beyond all others, the law which fixes, so to speak, the equation of the mind of man in the orbit appointed for the consummation of his destiny.