HISTORY OF THE CHURCH

IN THE

EIGHTEENTH AND NINETEENTH CENTURIES.

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We now return from our excursion in general literature to the internal history of the church and religion, in order to reproduce the history of theological science, which also engaged Lessing's attention down to his own times. I feel, indeed, the difficulty of presenting the history of this science, which can only be thoroughly understood by those who have devoted themselves to it, to an audience to whom practical religion and a general scientific interest must seem much more important than its more learned aspects. Still, we cannot entirely disregard these learned labors. They were wrought in theology at the very time when the transformation took place in German literature generally.

The old theology of disputations, as represented in the seventeenth century by learned and excellent men, had outlived its day. Pietism had overthrown the old orthodoxy and its ossified scholasticism, and had set up in its place an active, earnest, and practical religious life. But Pietism, from the beginning, had shown less interest in theological science.

1 Comp. on this section, Dr. K. F. Kahnis, Der innere Gang des Protestantismus seit Mitte des vorigen Jahrhunderts. 2nd Ed. Leipzig, 1880.
than in practical piety. Science was regarded by it simply as a means of appropriating the edifying materials as such; and thus by a skillful and learned study of the Bible, it fitted itself to work beneficially upon the church as a whole, and upon the hearts of individuals. The research, investigation, and proof of doctrine pressing through doubt, lay far out of its path, and was regarded by it even with great distrust. This investigation, however, had inevitably to come. It was awakened from without. The English Deists had brought against the Bible and Christianity a great many objections which it was not possible to answer by mere authority. They had used a great many weaknesses presented by the theology of the day, and called attention to many defective modes of proof. It was also time to see that many influences should be subjected to new and impartial examination and sifting. The question now was not merely whether a doctrine was grounded on the Bible, but the Bible itself,—a collection of sacred books from which Protestantism derived all its theological knowledge,—became the subject of learned investigation. The interpretation of the Scriptures was not the only subject of debate; but the history of the Bible, its origin, the experiences through which it had passed, and the relation of its individual parts to the whole (the history of the canon), were also discussed.

For the Christian who saw in the Bible more than a human book, who beheld in it the living inspiration of the Divine Word, the ground of faith and of hope, the thought was somewhat painful that this book should be handed over, like a corpse, to the anatomical knife, that every one might try upon it the sharpness of his weapon and his proficiency in his art. And yet this dissection could not be avoided. It had to be undertaken, even in the interest of the truth itself. We must not overlook the fact that the Bible has two sides,—the divine and the human. We delight most to consider it in its divine aspects, the way in which God regards it, as a unity, as the one unchangeable Word of God, as the expression of the divine will to mankind, a pledge of the divine love and its paternal designs in our behalf, and as
the living witness of what God did for our fathers in the ancient times, and of what he has done for us in Christ. It was in this divine light that Luther and the Reformers regarded the Scriptures, and every evangelical Christian must so conceive of them if he would have a firm and sure foundation for his faith. But the Bible has also its human, external, and historical side, and Luther and the Reformers, even in their day, viewed it also from this side; and if we ourselves would not have our faith degenerate into a blind, and finally into a dead and literal one, we must follow their example. Viewed from its human side, the Bible appears to us in the historical aspect of manifoldness, as a collection of writings produced at various times, by various authors, in various styles, and under various historical relations and circumstances, which we need to study according to human methods if we would understand the Bible. And to this must be added, finally, the multiplication of the Bible by means of copyists, the variety of readings resulting from the different copies, and the consequent task for the critics, whose business it is to ascertain and restore the correct reading. Finally, we cannot fail to notice that the Bible, like all works of antiquity, has been regarded at different times with different feelings,—now with a child-like, impartial spirit, now with fantastic, playful willfulness, and now with a cold and prosaical understanding, which rejects all imagination. Upon science, therefore, has devolved the necessity of ascertaining secure principles of interpretation, so that, wherever it is possible, the Bible may be read in its own peculiar light and be understood from its own point of view. We have in the Bible modes of speech, proverbs, metaphors, and comparisons similar to those that meet us in other writings of antiquity, and especially in those of the East. These must be understood, and by means of this knowledge the reader must be placed in living, human, and historical connection with the times in which the Scriptures had their origin. That this method of treating the Holy Scriptures is not only useful and instructive, but also promotive of reading the Bible, every one will confess who has felt the difficulty of thoroughly comprehend-
ing it without learned help; and all of us will here readily agree with Goethe, who says, "that the Bible becomes more and more beautiful as we understand it better;—that is, the more a man sees and understands that every word has had its peculiar, special, direct, and individual relation to certain circumstances and relations of time and place."

We must regard it as a great advantage, a real progress in science, that there was a great stir and activity in science from the first decades of the eighteenth century. Still, many apprehended danger in these movements, now with more and now with less reason. As in all human affairs a great many blunders occur before the truth is ascertained, so it was here. Men spoke of the impartiality of investigation, as against the old orthodoxy, and very many nobly strove for it; but it was soon seen that even here there was a new partiality, developing in opposition to the old partiality for antiquated prejudices, which was quite as slavishly devoted to its prejudices as any that preceded it. And if the fathers brought apostolic Christianity into the orthodox theology of the seventeenth century, the sons were in a fair way either to carry the skepticism of the seventeenth century into the Bible, or, if that could not be done, to take out of the Bible whatever did not agree with that skepticism. But before we reach our decision we must obtain the same clear view of these efforts themselves. As far as the so-called Biblical criticism is concerned, that is, the effort to represent the Greek text of the New Testament in its original purity, we meet with two men, who were otherwise very different in their theological thinking. We mean Albert Bengel, of Württemberg, and our own countryman, J. J. Wettstein. Of Bengel's labors (even in this department) we shall treat hereafter, in connection with his entire personal history. For the present we shall speak of Wettstein.

John Jacob Wettstein, the great-grandson of the celebrated burgomaster, was born in Basle, on the 5th of March, 1693.1 He was the second son of the assistant, and afterwards regular pastor, John Rudolph Wettstein of St. Leon-

1 Comp. my treatise in Illgen's Histor. theol. Zeitschrift, 1839. I.
ard's, and at an early age exhibited strong natural talents. After he had attended the schools and university of that city, in the latter of which he enjoyed the instruction of Buxtorf, Werenfels, Christian Iselin and Lewis Frei, he cultivated his mind still further by extensive travel, and in London he made the acquaintance of the celebrated critic and philologian, Bentley, for whom he undertook to examine the libraries of Paris. He was taken away from this learned labor by the acceptance of a chaplaincy to the Swiss troops in Holland, where he remained in Herzogenbusch from November, 1716, until the summer of the following year. From that position he was called in July, 1717, to an assistant pastorate in Basle, and in 1720 he accepted the deaconate of St. Leonard's, which came to him by the recently introduced custom of the lot. Wettstein did not at first feel at home in these narrow limits. He painfully missed the elevated intercourse which he had enjoyed with the learned men with whom he had become acquainted in his travels; but he sought in the meantime to go on as well as he could with his scientific investigations, in connection with his numerous official duties, and to make himself useful by giving private lessons to pupils. He also established pleasant relationships with his earlier instructors, Professors Iselin and Lewis Frei. Misunderstandings, however, soon arose between these men and himself; and although Frei had formerly incited Wettstein to his critical investigations, he now began to find fault with his labors, and to prevent him from publishing an edition of the Greek New Testament, on which Wettstein had been laboring for years. Very soon injurious reports were spread respecting errors which Wettstein taught the students; and there was an effort made to discover heresies even in his sermons. A complaint which had been presented at the Diet of Baden by the representatives of Zürich and Berne against the Basle representative, in regard to Wettstein's erroneous teachings, gave occasion for a formal investigation, which began in the summer of 1729. We do not design to enter here into an examination of the legal documents of this trial, for such a course would afford us but little edification. It speaks but
little for the impartiality of the judges of Wettstein that they should remove a preacher of blameless life, and a theologian who afterwards obtained a European reputation, because of loose rumors, the miserably written reports of a few of his hearers, and upon the highly indefinite affirmation of citizens under oath,—for instance, of a coppersmith, a shoemaker, and a cooper. This act not only grieved his profoundly depressed father, but was done against the earnest wish of the whole church, which, represented by a large number of the most respected heads of families, presented a numerously signed petition in behalf of their pastor.

The removal of Wettstein took place in May, 1730. He immediately took his departure for Amsterdam, where he had relatives, the celebrated book-dealers, for whom he was preparing his New Testament. Here he was offered the position of the deceased Clericus in the College of the Remonstrants. Wettstein returned, however, the following year to Basle in order to vindicate his theological reputation, which had been endangered by his removal. The trial was therefore recommenced. The government did not appear disinclined to aid Wettstein against the clergy. The clergy, however, used every means in their power to keep up their credit. The very venerable Samuel Werenfels refused to identify himself with their cause, and withdrew entirely from the theological convention. Others gradually became sick of the business. Wettstein, however, spoiled everything by the bitter tone he assumed in his correspondence with the government; and finally nothing remained for him but to again turn his back upon his native city, and to accept the proffered position at Amsterdam. From this city his reputation spread all over Europe. Basle was not destined to be benefited by that reputation, for the efforts which were afterwards made to win him back again to a professorship in its university failed, first, because of the stubbornness of his enemies, and then by the refusal of the Remonstrants to part with their celebrated teacher. In 1751 Wettstein's Greek Testament made its appearance, a work which theologians of all shades of opinion still agree in regarding as one of the most learned productions, and a
JOHN DAVID MICHAELIS.

repository of thorough Biblical research. It is a work on which this industrious man studied himself almost blind, and to which he applied all his possessions, his talents, his time, and his rest. After visiting his aged mother in Basle, he died, unmarried, in Amsterdam, on the 23rd of March, 1754.

It was not possible for Basle to stop critical investigation by the banishment of Wettstein any more than it was, a few years afterwards, to put an end to Pietism and similar tendencies by persecution. We will not deny that Wettstein really made some departures here and there in his theological views from the doctrines of the orthodox church. It may even be true that, as he was charged, he inclined to Socinianism; but so much is now confessed, that his doctrinal views exerted no influence upon his learned labors, but that he gave heed only to stern scientific reasons. And as for his relations to his parishioners as a preacher, they would not have been so anxious to retain him if his doctrine had been really as offensive as his most violent enemies represented.

Learned Biblical research found other representatives in the course of the century. We name here John David Michaelis, a man who, by means of his great knowledge of the Oriental languages, greatly assisted, in connection with our own Albert von Haller, in establishing the reputation of the newly founded University of Gottingen. Born at Halle, 1717, Michaelis first enjoyed the advantage of the Orphan House, and then of the University, and further promoted his culture by considerable travel,—Holland and England being the countries most frequently visited at that time by German theologians. He entered upon his position in Gottingen in 1745, and carried on his various learned labors there until his death. Frederick the Great sought in vain to draw him into his service. During the continuance of the Seven Years' War Michaelis occupied himself with preparations for a journey to Arabia, which was not made by him, but which Carsten Niebuhr afterwards undertook in his place. It was a journey which the King of Denmark, Frederick V., had ordered at his own expense, and which we may say, in passing, contributed largely to a clearer knowledge of the East and of its customs,
and consequently to the explanation of the history and state of the Bible-lands. Michaelis did his part by learned investigations. He may, indeed, have seen the East too much from his study, and thus may have washed off with pedantic fingers much of the peculiar beauty of the pictures of the Bible, as well as much of the delicate pollen from its flowers; but no one will question the merit of his learning.¹

A still greater light than this rather dry Michaelis arose in Helmstedt, and afterward shone in Göttingen. We refer to Lawrence von Mosheim, born at Lübeck in 1693,—a man whose honorable career was as worthy of love as his learning was thorough and vast. There is scarcely a department of theology which has not received light and incitement from his labors. Mosheim is the father of modern church history. In ethics, he began a new epoch; and a new period in the history of German homiletics dates from him,—the eloquent Mosheim. He was called the German Tillotson, the German Bourdaloue. What was needed in Michaelis, an elevated perception and taste, Mosheim possessed in a very high degree; and this gave a peculiar charm to his learned researches and treatises, as well as to his sermons. Mosheim was thoroughly orthodox. But he was mild and tolerant toward others, and in this he differed essentially from the old orthodox teachers. In church history he first took that most excellent and impartial position which grants full justice to those in error and those who think differently from ourselves; which gives to their system a thorough examination and illustration, and subjects them, as the physician does diseases which he treats, to a purely scientific treatment. In his theological thinking he has been justly compared to Melanchthon.

While Mosheim had delivered church history from the bondage of controversial dogmas, and had secured to it a free and worthy position as a purely historical science, Ernesti

¹ Dr. Tholuck describes Michaelis as one of the chief pioneers of neology, though not because he indulged in bold neological assumptions but because he was devoid of religious life, retaining only the external form of orthodoxy, but abandoning its essence and spirit. See Tholuck's *Vermischte Schriften*, Vol. II. p. 180.
and Semler sought to make also the exposition of the Scriptures independent of the previous ecclesiastical dogmas. Strictly speaking, it had ever been a Protestant principle that the doctrinal system should be accommodated to the Bible, and not that the Bible should be accommodated to a system of doctrine constructed by men. The Basle Confession, for example, declared, on its very appearance, that all its assertions were subordinate to the decision of the Divine Scriptures, and that if anybody could teach its authors a better one from the Scriptures they would willingly submit to this better decision. But subsequently it became common in the Protestant Church to assume at the outset the teaching of the Reformers and also the doctrinal definitions of the later theologians (of the second generation), as settled truth, and to explain Biblical passages according to mere tradition, exactly as people had previously done. The theologian read the Bible through the spectacles of his ecclesiastical system, and the layman read it through the spectacles of his catechism; and it was regarded improper to adopt any other explanation than the old traditional one. But that was not Protestant.

John Augustus Ernesti, born in Thuringia, 1707, was Professor of Ancient Literature in the University of Leipzig after 1742, and Professor of Theology after 1759. He is regarded as the founder of a new exegetical school, whose principle simply was that the Bible must be rigidly explained according to its own language, and, in this explanation, it must neither be bribed by any external authority of the church, nor by our own feeling, nor by a sportive and allegorizing fancy,—which had frequently been the case with the Mystics,—nor, finally, by any philosophical system whatever. He here united in the main with Hugo Grotius, who had laid down similar principles in the seventeenth century. Ernesti was a philologist. He had occupied himself just as enthusiastically with the ancient classics of Rome and Greece as with the Bible, and claimed that the same exegetical laws should be observed in the one case as in the other. He was perfectly

1 See Vorlesungen, Pt. III. p. 484. (2nd Ed.); and Articles Ernesti and Grotius in Herzog's Real-Encyclopædie.
right in this respect; even the Reformers wished the same thing. His error here was, perhaps, in overlooking too much the fact that, in order to perceive the religious truths of the Scriptures, we must not only understand the meaning of a declaration in its relations to language and history, but that we must also spiritually appropriate it by feelingly transposing ourselves to it, and by seeking to understand it from itself. Who will deny that, in order to understand the Epistles of the Apostle Paul, we must adopt from the very outset a mode of view different from that which we would employ in order to understand the Epistles of Cicero, since the circle of ideas of these two men is very different? Religious writings can be perfectly understood only by an anticipating spirit, which peers through the logical and grammatical web of the thoughts to the depth below. Now this does not take place by an arbitrary tearing of the web, but by a harmonious and universal activity of the expositor's minds. If, therefore, Ernesti substituted a grammatical, dry, and unimaginative exegesis for an arbitrary, fantastical, and yet ingenious explanation of the Mystics and allegorists, his work was a very good counteraction, but it did not go far enough. Besides, the suspicion could easily arise that, by this means, the Bible would be brought too much within the circle of merely grammatical learning, and the mere means for understanding it be converted into an end. The principle that we must expound the Scriptures like every other book could at least be so misapprehended that it might be placed in the same rank with the other writings of antiquity, and the assistance of the Holy Spirit, which is the only guide to the depths of the Scriptures, be regarded as superfluous.

As for Ernesti personally, he was orthodox, like Michaelis and Mosheim. He even defended the Lutheran view of the Lord's Supper. And yet these men, and others of like character, are distinguished from their orthodox predecessors by their insisting upon independence, by struggling for sobriety, and, if you will allow, for dryness also. But, with all this, they were further distinguished from their predecessors by a certain freedom and mildness of judgment, which men had not been ac-
customed to find in theologians. Without any desire or wish on their own part, they effected a transition to a new theological method of thought, which soon passed beyond the limits of their own labors. The person in whom this new theological tendency assumed also a neological character, and which transformed the previous ideas of doctrine on essential points, was John Solomon Semler. It is necessary that we dwell at length on this man, who is the biographer of his own remarkable life, for we can see in him how the effort for innovation, which was now becoming the spirit of the age, could not arise from the frivolous desire of an ungodly feeling, but from a pious and honest sentiment, and could co-exist with it. Semler is also further important as constituting, for the University of Halle, a remarkable turning-point from the period of the hitherto prevailing, but now declining, Pietism to the period of predominant Rationalism.

John Solomon Semler, the son of a preacher, was born at Saalfeld on the 18th of December, 1725. In his biography he boasts very much of the faithful care of his mother, to whom he owed his first religious impressions, just as has been the case with many other great men. He soon made rapid progress in the school of his native city, and even there became acquainted with the character and conduct of the Pietists of that day. He relates how his father, after the death of his mother, went over to the party which he had first disapproved of, and gradually "became accustomed to the new dialect." Efforts were now made to win young Semler also; but he showed little inclination toward it. Yet he was finally induced by his father to attend one of the devotional services held by his friends. "I cannot say," he remarks, "that I was very much affected by this first service." He took particular offence at the disclosures made of the state of the soul on single days and hours. And yet he blamed himself for not being able to acquire a taste for these godly exercises. His natural cheerfulness forsook him, and he grew serious and remorseful. Notwithstanding the encouragement received from his father and the ducal court,
he was yet devoid of that which the Pietists called the "sealing", or the inward and immediate certainty of adoption by God; and he struggled for it even before his departure for the university. "There was no corner in the house," he tells us himself, "where, in order to be perfectly alone and unobserved, I did not often kneel and weep many tears, that God might deem me worthy of this great grace; . . . but I still continued under the law. The Moravian hymns were of as little aid to me as many new ones that were known in Saalfeld, and were sung in the societies there. . . . I examined myself carefully to see whether I consciously clung to any sin, or retained anything that was forbidden. I reproached myself several times for only giving one pfenning to the poor-collection on Sunday when I had several in my pocket. I told my father about it, and asked him for as many groschens, which I contributed the next time with great joy; and it is now a very pleasant memory of my life at the university that I used to give pieces of money to the poor." But with these, and similar discoveries and corrections of his errors, he constantly regarded it as his duty to be very sad, and he continued many months in a state of sorrow similar to that in which his brother had been involved.

Semler went to the University of Halle, though not yet seventeen years of age, but very well read. Matters had remarkably cleared up since Wolf's appearance here. The Pietists constituted only one party still; their leader, Joachim Lange, died a year after Semler's arrival; while John Siegmund Baumgarten, the learned, pious, but rather cold theologian, was heard by the largest number of students. Semler soon became his favorite scholar, and he boasts of the love with which the Halle Pietists treated him; but he neither could nor would follow their advice to stop his useless study,—that the Savior could teach him better than all men. There now arose in him a strange disquietude, an anxious displeasure with himself, and a longing for inward peace. He could at no time regard himself as pardoned. "I still remember quite well," he says, "that I went out of the recitation-room one evening and walked along the great court of the Orphan
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House, and in deep sorrow expressed such wishes as these: 'O that I were this pile of ice, or this block of wood!' (St. Augustine had had experiences similar to these). And yet he could not fully adopt the terminology of the Pietists. He constantly became more fully convinced that there must be a deficiency in the correct knowledge of the soul when people stretch all the inward states of men, so to speak, on one last, and would also attribute an importance to that which is really grounded rather on accidental and natural states of mind.

He commenced at the same time to distinguish between religion and theology. To the latter he reckoned many acquirements necessary to the discharge of the clerical office, but without making salvation dependent upon their correctness. He constantly became more fully convinced that one may be a pious Christian in heart and in fact, and yet be in great doubt on the dogmas, which it is the part of the understanding to define more specifically and to arrange. This distinction between a private religion, as he subsequently termed it, and a publicly current theology, pervaded Semler's entire thinking. There is, indeed, a true element at the bottom of it,—the separation of faith from knowledge, of that which constitutes the ground of every one’s salvation from that which serves for the explanation and understanding of religious life, and for the impartation and interchange of thoughts. He who has reflected but little on religious life must confess that all our notions of divine things, and all our definitions and expressions, are quite insufficient to repeat exactly for others that which exists in our own inward life. Even the language of the Bible is only sufficient for general agreement; each one explains for himself the Biblical expression in his own way, and appropriates it to his own necessities in a manner different from his neighbor. One prefers the living picture to the barren idea, while another prefers to deprive the picture of its ideas, and render its poetry into prose. Very much depends on the individual's natural constitution, degree of culture, and experience; and up to a certain point we may say that, together with the common confession of
one faith, every one has his own domestic religion, his own

 treasure of experiences in life, his own views of life, and his

 own circle of ideas,—which nobody else has, or if he has

 them, possesses them in a different way. And this should

 cause us no regret whatever. There has never yet been a

 universal, objective religion which has had the same value

 with every one, just as an algebraic formula in mathematics;

 and wherever there has been a disposition to set up such

 a religion, or impose it upon others, the bony skeleton of a

 dead orthodoxy has invariably taken the place of a living

 development. The religion which is proclaimed and preached

 to us from without by the church and its servants, becomes

 our possession just when we transmute it into our flesh and

 blood, incorporate it, and, so to speak, so repeat it spiritu-

 ally within us as to bring forth a new creation from the

 treasure of our inward life. The old Mystics desired to do

 this, and the same thing was now craved not by the individual

 alone, nor by Semler alone, with whom we here have to deal

 incidentally, but above all by the times.

 The new age may be principally distinguished by its assert-

 ing subjectivity above all else,—that is, the right of the

 individual to grasp and judge matters in his own way, and to

 look with his own eyes into religion as well as into politics

 and literature. Frederick the Great's sentiment, that "every-

 one shall be saved in his own fashion," was not adopted by

 him alone, but became more and more the sentiment of

 the age; and there was more comprised in it than a mere

 witticism. But this right of subjectivity may be carried too

 far and abused; and it was abused. The subjectivity of the

 individual may be easily so asserted that the bond of fellow-

 ship may be loosened, the general welfare disturbed, and the

 higher authority, that should stand above all opinion and

 vacillation, endangered. A double case may here occur.

 Either a powerful individual may strive to impose his opin-

 ions upon others, and be elevated to authority,—a procedure

 which produces intolerance, and a suppression of the freedom

 of others,—a new papacy; or it may happen that the indi-


dividual, withdrawing with his private conviction either alone
or in company with sympathizers, may allow others to do just as they please,—which produces sectarianism, and finally leads, if every one would act in this way, to a dissolution of all fellowship, and to the ruin of the church. Then, in addition to these two ways, there is still a third to be borne in mind: that one keep his own private conviction to himself, but, whatever it be, that he accommodate himself to the common use of language, outwardly confess a certain church-fellowship, and take part in public service, yet doing all this without entertaining an inward conviction of what he professes. This is, indeed, the most dangerous and slippery way of the three, for when the tension between a public and private faith has reached a certain point, it must necessarily conduct to an inward division, yea, to double-dealing and hypocrisy. And this is just what Semler's opponents have charged him with, and afterward have charged home upon the whole tendency, the so-called theory of conformation or accommodation.

Yet we must guard against drawing hasty conclusions to the detriment of individuals. As for Semler personally, he was far removed from all hypocrisy. It was just because he would not play the hypocrite that he could not adopt those narrow forms which the Pietism of his age exacted of him. It was pure candor on his part to profess openly the relation of his private religion to the doctrines of the church; had he been a hypocrite he would not have done this, but would have remained silent. But here he lived in the hope that the doctrines of the church, which seemed to him to embrace many obsolete and distasteful elements, would gradually become cleared up and transformed, so that what is to be considered in the teaching of the Bible as only temporal and local ideas would be gradually separated from what he regarded the universal truth, applicable to all ages; and it was in this anticipation that he meanwhile assumed the position which we have now designated. And between what he called his private and public religion there were really many common points of contact; and he inwardly held this the more firmly the more he had to confess that he did not entertain the same view in all points.
It was, however, not Semler who had introduced this breach between the common doctrine of the church and the conviction of the individual; it was already in existence, and Semler was placed in it. He was not called to close it up, but he undoubtedly did contribute to make it larger, for, by the critical inquiry into which he was constantly drawn further and further, he doubted much which had hitherto stood fast and had lately passed as authentic, and threw much overboard which it was afterward believed necessary to gather carefully up again. Semler was, on the whole, not the man to breathe a new spirit into theology, and reanimate what was in process of dissolution; his was not a creative but a critical nature; and like Michaelis, he was rather a book-worm, and, as we are accustomed to say, often could not see the forest for the trees. He tells us himself how, when a boy, his father once bought a great multitude of books at an auction by the yard, so that the first volumes of a work fell to him, while the following ones dropped into the hands of others. The library thus raked up hap-hazard formed the foundation of Semler's first studies. There is something characteristic and symbolical in the circumstance. I cannot avoid looking upon what Semler wrote in his numerous volumes as only fragments, as if he wrote only the first parts of the history of recent theology, which we cannot understand without those that follow,—which latter the age has written and is still writing, and by which the former alone can be understood. There was something chaotic in that extensive knowledge of his, which nobody can gainsay, and there was a chaos and confusion totally deprived of a carefully considered plan; besides, the style of both his German and Latin works was devoid of all neatness and delicacy.

We have already anticipated Semler's outward life, having now sketched the picture of his intellectual nature as it was subsequently filled out. Let us now return to him as a student in Halle. After Semler's increasing attachment to the mild Baumgarten, of whose house he finally became an inmate, and after he had acquired a certain reputation by his literary labors, he went to Coburg, in 1749, where he
received the title of professor, and, together with his theological studies, edited the newspaper there. In 1751 he was elected Professor of History, and (remarkably) of Poetry also, in the little University of Altorf. Yet after a year's interval he was called, through Baumgarten's intercession, to occupy a theological chair in Halle, where he renewed his old friendship with his former teacher, and labored at his side until his death. Let those who are so ready to charge Semler with levity and an irreligious sentiment learn from his own language what his feelings were on the assumption of his professorship. He looked upon the call as coming from God, and one which he ought to accept. "I was thus submissive," he says, "and subject to God's government, and therefore calm and unsolicitous as to all possible changes, because I daily learned to love resignation more and more. There is something very peculiar in reference to one's own conscience, and no man can appoint or change his own course and tendency. I well know that some of my contemporaries, who have never passed along this way, speak quite otherwise, and say, 'If a man mean well and is good, he will learn by experience, though he is not very shrewd,' etc. Now, there must be at least some such men as are willing to follow the dictates of their own conscience, and who have a heart to endure whatever may come." Semler did not conceal his apprehension of the unpleasant complications in which he would become involved with the Halle Pietists. He had a foreboding of "theological overseers." However, after he had laid the proposition of the professorship before God, he determined to accept it. He assumed the office with the most delicate conscientiousness, having previously accepted the Doctor's degree. But far from attaching too much importance to this dignity, he confesses that, in his disputation, he learned that God gives grace to the humble,—a fact still true in our day. He was led to calm communion with himself, and, as he himself says, he constantly had new cause to confide in God, and to feel easy with this confidence by sincere gratitude. He often sat up until two or three o'clock

at night in order to prepare for his lectures, or, as he frankly says, "to be able to read gravely and conscientiously; for I have kept seriously before me from the very beginning the great importance of the academic lecture; and I know very well that the professor should not occupy his place because of the office, nor simply to enjoy his salary in a comfortable way."

We cannot dwell further upon his very extensive labors as professor. He stirred up the mind in all directions, yet more negatively, and when he cleared up difficulties it was often in the wrong place. It was principally by his work on the Free Investigation of the Canon that he called attention to the human character of the historical rise of the Bible, as a collection of books emanating from different ages and various authors. With him, all these books did not have the same authority; he wished many of them, in the interest of religion, as the Song of Solomon for example, to be precluded from the collection. His mind, so far removed from all poetical contemplation, could not comprehend the Revelation of John. Had not even the poetic Luther made a similar confession of himself? Undoubtedly Semler permitted himself, in these opinions, to be led too much by his own view, without leading it to safe and universally approved principles. In the church history of previous centuries he employed likewise a very bold criticism, which rejected and would destroy many a testimony that had hitherto passed as authentic. In doctrinal theology he referred to the changes which Christian dogmas had undergone in different ages. Yet he was the one who afterwards gave the first impulse to the science lately introduced into the circle of theological studies by the name of history of doctrines. But not only in church history and the doctrines of the church, but also in the history and doctrine of the Bible he believed that he should separate what belonged to the contemporaneous civilization and views of the Jewish people from that which comprised an externally valid doctrinal standard. Thus he particularly reckoned the notion of the devil and demoniacal possessions among the former class, and strove also to regard the further views of
the Messiah, the importance of sacrifices, etc., chiefly in their Jewish national character, and to show how they have gath-
ered Christian dogmas about them, and how they should be again sundered from this accidental form.

This effort to trace back dogmas to their rise, to under-
stand their human, historical character, and to separate the kernel from the shell, was certainly not bad in itself; it was even of service to the interest of impartial science and of religion struggling for clearness. But Semler's error was in remaining on the surface, without pervading the deep meaning of the doctrines, and in rejecting as a mere temporal and local notion much that was really a part of the peculiar nature and character of Christianity. His limiting the perma-
nent in Christianity chiefly to that which served, according to his own expression, for "mending men," drew upon him the censure that he was the pioneer of that view which re-
duces the religion of Christianity to a mere serviceable system of morals, although Semler personally found much more than this in Christianity. Semler's life furnishes us with the most touching evidences of the earnest character of his private religion, notwithstanding his bold criticism. He never takes a step in life without looking above and within. He speaks in a tenderly pious way of his betrothal, and of his marriage, which he had consummated before his call to Altorf, in Coburg, with the daughter of the proprietor of his boarding-house. "I alone know," says he, "how totally prostrated my spirit lay at this period, and how I spent days and nights without any heart and rest, until I could finally accommodate myself to the general law of God's supreme government. . . . My spirit began to soar more earnestly toward God, and, buried in profound and perfect subjection, to become . . . rid of its own disquiet." His marriage becoming a decided fact, he continues: "It is not necessary that I recount what a feeling of holy and modest gratitude toward God I had, and how much I labored to preserve this inward quiet and resignation as the most certain ground of a prudent and profitable conduct."

We also get a very favorable impression of his domestic
life and Christian training when he tells us how his wife sat beside him engaged in her matronly labors while he continued his studies, and how he studied amid the noise and games of his children.\textsuperscript{1} "We had the children continually about us when they were not engaged with their teacher; we have been their chief instructors in reading, as we had them read alternately a hymn, a psalm, or some pages from a good book. We taught them to sing a hymn with us, and then we propounded questions on it. They learned Gellert's hymns by heart. . . . There was undisturbed peace and contentment in our circle; the servants never saw or heard anything equivocal, not to mention disorder, and each one was impressed by the consideration of my wife in all matters that came up for attention, and each one observed our equal love and harmony. In all merely domestic matters I depended entirely upon the knowledge of so faithful a wife. I committed to her hands all my income and outlay. For twenty years this great uniformity of our life has been maintained; both we and our children knew and felt that we were to each other the nearest and most intimate society in the world, and therefore we discharged every duty devolving upon us. Not much, indeed, had been written on education, but we drew our information from the pure fountain of religion, and though we lived without much splendor, nothing was wanting to us."

Semler's practical Christianity is specially commended by the manner in which he mentions the death of his promising daughter, who was twenty-one years of age, and who speedily followed her mother to the grave. "About nine o'clock in the evening," he tells us, "I again pronounced the benediction upon her. With a breaking heart I lay down to sleep a little, when I was sent for to come to her again. ‘Pardon me, my dear father, for needing you so much; do help me to die with a faith and determination becoming your Christian daughter!’ My heart took courage, and I spoke to her of the great difference between this life and the life of God’s invisible world, of which she would soon be a blessed mem-

\textsuperscript{1} \emph{Lebensbeschreibung}, pp. 249, 283.
Semler's opposition to deism.

ber. She sang snatches of songs, for I said but little to her. When I addressed her, 'My dear daughter, you will soon rejoin your noble mother;' she answered, 'Oh yes, and what rapture will I enjoy!' I fell down at her bedside and again committed her soul to the almighty and infinite care of God. Just before I went to my lecture I visited her again. I asked her if she still remembered the hymn, 'Thou art mine because I grasp Thee,' when she said, 'Oh yes,' and repeated the verse, 'O Lord, my Refuge, Fountain of my joys!' 'Yes, eternal,' I added. I then left her, feeling pretty sure that she would last somewhat longer. But I was called from my lecture, when I again committed her grand spirit to God who gave it, and closed her eyes myself. My bitter grief now subsided into calm meditation and a sweet acquiescence in the wise will of God. Now I know what the real joy is of having seen one of my own children die so calmly, and of feeling that I had some share in the training that could end so triumphantly. And I still publicly thank her good and conscientious teachers for having contributed, apart from myself, to the formation of her character. Therefore, in our day, when much is said and written about an education not strictly Christian, I would recommend, from my own experience, that all good and prudent parents make use of a wholesome Christian education. Thus child-like and beautifully have people, trained as Christians, been dying for many centuries. Whether greater or better examples ever occur remains yet to be proved." These last words have evidently a polemic relation to the system of education which Basedow was propagating in Germany at that time.

It is most remarkable that Semler, without changing his fundamental views themselves, subsequently opposed the labors of the Deists and naturalists as decidedly as he had first fought orthodoxy and Pietism. Thus we shall see him standing out boldly not only against Basedow the Rationalist, but also against the Wolfenbüttel Fragments, and C. F. Bahrdt, the neologian. Verily, however much Semler at the beginning opposed Pietism as a one-sided tendency,—as he felt that he ought to criticise it unfavorably, in harmony with the
impressions of his youth,—he knew just as well how to value its estimable side, and bring it to prominence. It was only the theology of the Pietists that was repulsive to him, according to the distinction which he thought himself compelled to make; he reverenced their religion as manifested by the sentiments and deeds of the better Pietists, but the real Mystics pleased him much more than the Pietists. He confesses himself, that for a long time he had entertained the usual prejudice against them, but that he subsequently passed a much more favorable opinion upon them. Jacob Boehme's writings afforded him a peculiar and secret pleasure. "We may in general," he says, "know and praise the mild and pure spirit of the Mystics, and the earnest and holy sentiment of such Christians, without going so far as to approve and imitate all their steps and all their opinions. The real spirit of Christianity, in distinction from naturalism, can be most easily perceived from small works of that character; a most inward, pure, and holy order of the powers of the soul distinguishes the Christian character and efficacy of Christianity, which is not, and can not be, the case with naturalism. . . . On all these associations I have learned to pronounce a much more moderate opinion than I entertained at the beginning; I have come to look much more mildly even on the new Moravian Church."\footnote{Lebensbeschreibung. p. 269.}

As if the spirit of Mysticism would take revenge on the cold man of understanding, which Semler is usually regarded, it even led him, toward the close of his life, to the quicksands of alchemy and the manufacture of gold. He died on the 14th of March, 1791, at sixty-six years of age.

In Semler we have become acquainted with a man who stood fast with one foot upon the old ground of a solid, pious, German, and Protestant education, while with the other he stepped into the new age, where so much was convulsed that had hitherto stood firm, and at whose portals he himself trembled. With his so-called private religion he belonged, though he would not confess it, to the previous age, or rather he still lived on the capital which had been collecting
in the Protestant church ever since Luther's day, and which had become largely increased, by God's blessing, through such men as Arndt and Spener, while his theology broke loose, though not without violent conflicts, from connection with the earlier thinking. Considered from the standpoint of the new skepticism, he was regarded by many at least as a Pietist at heart; but in understanding and in science he became the head of Rationalism, a place usually assigned him in history. But the contradiction between Pietism and Rationalism was less decided in him than it may appear to us now, after the lapse of more than half a century, as the antitheses have separated from each other more decidedly of late, and the battle has enlarged on many sides. In the following lecture we shall see to what extremes and abysses the critical tendency, once excited, now led, and before which Semler's spirit shuddered with fearful forebodings.