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A table of contents for *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_bib-sacra\\_01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php)

## ARTICLE II.

REMARKS ON A SERMON DELIVERED BY THE LATE DR. EMMONS OF FRANKLIN BEFORE THE NORFOLK EDUCATION SOCIETY, DORCHESTER, JUNE 11, 1817.

By Rev. Leonard Withington, Newbury, Ms.

THE reputation of Dr. Emmons as a theologian has been destined to undergo all that variety which arises from the different degrees of attention which the public has been disposed to pay to his works. He has made his first, his second and his third impression on the public mind; his first impression was a strong, and, perhaps we may add, a blind admiration from his own little school of followers, and deep condemnation from the rest of the religious world; then came a time when his principles were generally discussed; and, while every body accorded him the excellence of a most luminous style and a clear perception of the conclusions to which he was to arrive, together with their connection with the premises, still he was regarded by many as a writer of perverse ingenuity, more pleased with a paradox than a common truth, never startled at his own conclusions, if he could support them with a seeming demonstration; in a word, a man who was willing to waste his powers on recondite subtleties rather than in promoting useful knowledge or practical piety. We believe his works are fast making their third, and, perhaps, permanent impression. We hear it suggested, and we fully accord with the suggestion, that few men stand as fair a chance, among New England authors, to be a classic as he. He had a double soul; he was not a mere *élève* of the Hopkinsian school; he uttered truths deep as the foundations of human thought, and lasting as eternity. He wanted nothing to make him one of the profoundest of reasoners but a more extensive acquaintance with the history of human speculation. Most of the Hopkinsians, we suspect, were men of great acuteness but of narrow erudition. They went over ground already beaten and were sometimes deceived by sophistries which the world had rejected; still they were bold, whole-souled men, and among them, none stood higher than the sage of Franklin. He was a perfect emanation of New England; close in his attention, deep in his insight, true to his convictions; earnest, consistent, luminous and sincere. We have heard him indeed censured for not knowing, or not distinguishing the cases when the pre-

mises support the conclusion from those in which the conclusion upsets the premises. But in this respect, Berkeley was more bold and paradoxical than he. Certainly no man can read him without many suggestions, which a mind far less fertile than that of the author of them, may work into permanent and useful truths.

The sermon on which we shall attempt a few remarks, was delivered more than thirty years ago. It is one of the happiest productions of the author. As Dr. Emmons never wrote without an aim, we are inclined to think that he had in view some opinions then growing into fashion, which he regarded, at least, as partial errors. Possibly he might have had Andover in view. Possibly it may be said, that he had very little knowledge of the science which he seems to depreciate—Biblical Criticism. The sermon may be regarded as one of the most beautiful specimens of friendly severity ever offered to a rival whom, by admonishing, we mean to correct. Dr. Emmons was not one of the soft souls that wind wreathes of roses around the victims they mean to sacrifice; nor was he a malignant man, whose object is pain and whose wounds are mortal. But such he was, both for morals and discernment, that, whenever he speaks, he deserves attention.

The prevalent doctrine, in some of our seminaries, when this discourse was delivered (and perhaps it still continues to be the same) was, that we must come to the Bible for theological knowledge, just as we come to the phenomena of nature for natural, with the mind dissociated from all its previous biasses and conceptions, a mere *tabula rasa*, and derive our system not from human creeds, but from the inspired volume; as Chalmers says, we must take our grammar and dictionary and interpret the Bible just as if we knew nothing before. The only corypheus we must adopt, is not systems, but history, customs, laws and manners; and your system must be your *last conclusion*; the suggestion of certain kinds of knowledge which have no system involved in them; that is, you must go through a long forest, without a ray of light, until you reach the further verge, and then it seems to be implied that the sunshine will break suddenly upon you. Long suspense was to lead you to conclusion, and painful doubt to happy solution. The public mind was then passing from the dogmatic teaching of a previous day to the new element; and no wonder if it did not stop at the middle point of truth and wisdom. It was at this time, that Dr. Emmons, who loved such an office, uttered this astonishing paradox: "No man, I believe, ever has formed, or ever can form, a consistent scheme or system of divinity from the Bible alone, without the aid of some systematical writer or instructor." See Ser-

mon, page 18. And again: "The knowledge of sacred history and biblical philology is very different from the proper knowledge of divinity." We remember the astonishment and even disgust with which these opinions were then by many received. And we must confess with some shame that we shared in the general censure. But time and observation have wrought a great revolution in our own mind. No doubt there is plausibility and even truth in placing creeds and systems far below the Bible in point of authority. But we are almost equally sure that Dr. Emmons uttered not only a paradoxical opinion but a salutary truth.

It is not true that *each individual* must be expected to derive all his opinions originally from the Bible; that is a task too mighty for any power short of the collected sagacity of the whole race. No doubt human opinions should be based wholly on the Bible. But the Bible is a deep book, an ancient book; and, like all other wise books, it has a latent system, which, when once discovered, harmonizes all its doctrines and pours light on every page. It has its *lóyos*, as the Platonists say—that is, a reigning thought, a harmonizing idea, which is above all language and by which language itself must be understood. Now until a man seizes this reigning idea, he is in a mist; he is like a mariner on a wide sea, without a polar star or compass; he is obliged to anticipate this *lóyos*—this predominant object as soon as possible. It is so necessary to him that in all successful investigations, in all explanations of dark and difficult treatises, the reader is obliged to adopt and abandon several false suppositions before he reaches the true. For nothing can be interpreted until the main end of interpretation is assumed and surmised, just as Columbus conjectured the existence of the Western world and even, in some degree, its direction, before he could possibly steer to find it. "In the beginning," says John, "was the word and the word—*lóyos*—was with God and the word was God." Without denying the personality of the word, we may say, that the system of which Christ was the incarnation, is latent in the first pages of the Bible and blazes on and illumines the last.

Comparisons are often taken from philosophy; and it is said that we must interpret the Bible as we investigate the laws of nature; bringing a blank mind to the light presented. But how is it in the kingdom of nature? For ages, God in his works as he has in his word, presented his truth in the most simple symbols to the human mind; that is, simple to him that has once received the key. For ages, the stars had glittered in the sky to the eye of the ancient astronomers, as they did to those of Kepler or Newton; and yet, for the want of the true key, these symbols were not understood. Let a man but

once whisper to an observer the Copernican system, and it saves him years of labor; his own observation then verifies the suggestion. In like manner, I can imagine an intelligent man on a desolate island; he is instructed in all science but that of religion; the Bible is washed up on shore in a sailor's chest; and he reads it. He is simple-hearted and wishes to know the truth. I will not say that he reads it in vain; he may gain much devotional and fragmentary knowledge. Nay, you may pour upon him all the light of history and biblical criticism, and yet I can imagine this man to read the Bible as much in vain for completing a theological system, as Timaeus or Hipparchus or any other old astronomer, looked in vain at the stars to find the integral order in which they moved. The truth is, we have no right to reject the common strength of our species and presumptuously throw ourselves on our own. And what is a creed or a system but a method which a large party, and perhaps the whole church, have judged to be the doctrinal key to the Bible. So far is it from being an impediment to impartial investigation, that I should rather read the Bible with the poorest system ever known, the Manichean, the Valentinian, or the Socinian, than none at all. Even the Ptolomaic error in astronomy was not an useless guide to final truth.

Most of the religious systems in the world present us with some leading idea, of which two things may be said. 1st. It is derived from a professed interpretation of the Bible, and 2nd. It is applied to the interpretation of other passages; just as Newton said, that the sum of philosophy is to derive the laws from the phenomena of nature, and then we apply these laws to interpret new phenomena.<sup>1</sup> The Socinian says the reigning idea is, to *bring life and immortality to light*, to encourage man to virtue. The Arminian says, that free agency and a sense of obligation is the prime conception. The Universalist declares, the annunciation of God's determination to save all, irrespective of any connection with duty, is the leading thought; and the Calvinist says, free grace, justification by faith and its concomitant truths, beam on every page. Now one or the other of these systems will steal into the mind and govern the views of interpretation of every man who is himself consistent and supposes the Bible to be so. If the honest reader finds that one of these reigning ideas fails to harmonize the various parts of revelation he must reject it, just as Kepler rejected (so much to his honor) various false hypotheses which he had adopted to harmonize the celestial motions. But let no man fear the early

<sup>1</sup> Newton's exact words are: *Omnis philosophiæ difficultas in eo versari videtur, ut a phaenomenis motuum investigemus vires naturae, deinde ab his viribus demonstremus phaenomena reliqua.*

adoption of systems; for as the author of this sermon has admirably asserted: "It is said that systems of divinity tend to prevent men from forming any real opinions of their own, and to infringe on the right of private judgment. This consequence no more flows from reading systematical writings than from reading any other books, or attending on any other theological instructions. The reason is, a man's opinions are as much his own, if he derives them from another, as if he derives them from his own research and examination. No man can be said to have a real opinion upon any subject, which is not derived from evidence; and if it be derived from evidence, it is totally immaterial whether he derives the evidence from his own investigation, or from conversation, or from reading, or from public or private instruction." Sermon, page 16. We may add, that every man *has* some conception of the leading ideas of revelation, and it is a miserable affectation to pretend that his mind is a *tabula rasa*, and then call this vacancy, impartiality.

The view taken in the foregoing remarks is abundantly verified in the history of the church. It is curious to see how the general mind coöperates with the individual; how the accumulated knowledge of a past age, like leaven, ferments and shapes the speculations of a subsequent period. We everywhere see a *tendency* which becomes more manifest in a *final result*. True orthodoxy, in its human development, shines not on the world like the sun, from a single majestic light, extinguishing all the inferior luminaries, but like the moon, surrounded by a host of assisting stars, which pour their united radiance on the spectator's eye. How was it with respect to the Trinity? That doctrine did not receive its definite shape until the Council of Constantinople was held. Even Athanasius is hardly sound in the symbols to which he gave a manifest tendency. The same may be said of that previous Calvinism, which indeed always existed in the church, undeveloped, untraced as a system, unseen in its unity, unpursued to its consequences; but which emerges and sinks, gleams out and hides itself, is asserted and contradicted in the writings of the fathers before the Pelagian age. This, I know, has been made an objection to the established creed; but certainly it was just so in philosophy, with regard to our most certain doctrines. The truth is, the public mind was constantly forming itself—giving to the individual a key to interpret the Bible by; abridging his labor in his independent investigations; and facilitating his march to truth by showing him the road which the collected labors of all the earnest, the intelligent and the good, had made open and plain before him. If it was necessary that elementary and simple truths should early be revealed to all who were seeking

salvation, it was very natural that SYSTEMATIC TRUTHS should be the discovery of united exertion.

It is strongly to be suspected, and indeed the opinion seems to be gaining ground every day, that even in philosophy the rigid derivation of all knowledge from induction has been pushed too far. *Man is the minister and interpreter of nature.* Be it so. Yet man is himself a system. He brings an implicit system in him when he comes to the interpretation of nature; and if nothing was seen by the independent reason, in vain would the senses observe the operations of the outward world. Take the *three laws* of motion as laid down by Newton as the foundation of his philosophy. Certainly the first of them, perhaps all of them, is such as not to be verified by experiment. They are seen and foreseen as the necessary conditions of all experimental philosophy; and they prove how impossible it is to separate the pure reason which idealizes, from the attentive observation which regulates idealism. The two powers must always be joined. But the inward reason must have a system, or, in stricter language, it is a system. It is an implicit, internal system; as the Platonist would call it, a dim vaticination of what is to be; a foreshown certainty that there is a connection in truths, and a forefelt relias for order and consistency. Indeed, in our apprehension, the laws of philosophizing were as well stated by Plato as they were by Bacon. The ancients failed in applying them. Plato, in the changes of the elements, insists upon it, that experiment and observation are perhaps always to be applied: *πρώτων μὲν οὖν ὑπάρχειν αἴσθησιν δεῖ τοῖς λεγομένοις ἀσί.*—Timaeus, page 61, C. Stallbaum. By *αἴσθησις* I understand *observation assisted by experiment.* And yet, in another part of his dialogue, he makes the GREAT LOCRIAN talk, of forms, or ideas: *ἀναίσθητα ὑφ' ἡμῶν, σοοῦμενα μόνον.* "If," says he, "true observation differs in nothing from those necessary truths perceived immediately by the mind, then the perceptions of our senses are as sure as the perceptions of our reason. But they are very different in their nature and origin. The one comes by teaching, the other by persuasion or probability; the one from true reason, the other without reason, i. e. without the independent reason; the one convinces without motion, i. e. without occurring in the phenomenal world, the other *after* such occurrence. Every man partakes of the last, but only the gods and a few of mortal race of the first."<sup>1</sup> He concludes, therefore, that there is a department which belongs to the independent reason only: *ὁ δὴ τοῖσις εἰληχεν ἐπισκοπεῖν.* Now the followers of Bacon almost deny this last element; and, indeed, great errors have sprung up in

<sup>1</sup> Timaeus, page 51, D. Stallbaum.

investigation in consequence of this denial. When Copernicus thought it necessary to account for the parallelism of the earth's axis by a *positive* cause, and when Leibnitz applied his *sufficient reason* to Newton's first law of motion, they both show in opposite ways the importance of keeping induction in its proper place.<sup>1</sup> In Dr. Brown's famous INQUIRY INTO THE RELATION OF CAUSE AND EFFECT, the whole fallacy of that treatise (and it is almost too gross to be a fallacy) in which he denies the existence of POWER, consists in demanding that *that* should be proved by observation which is obvious without proof to the independent reason: *τοῦτο, ὃ δὴ νόησις ἀλλήθεν ἐπισκοπεῖν*. Surely the argument εἰς ἀνάγκης, which Plato so often uses, is of *some* force.

When a man goes to the Bible, he has something within him, which meets and corresponds to the system there involved and presented. And, if he is a rational man, his first curiosity will be to form *some* outlines of the end and aim of the book, which is to enlighten his faith and harmonize his heart. He cannot understand the book in fragments, for he is not himself a fragment; he wishes to catch *some* glimpse of the central light—the harmonizing whole. The writer of this Article remembers very well when he first went in to see Mr. Catherwood's circular picture of Jerusalem, with what giddy confusion he received the first impression, and with what anxious suspense he asked the question: Where is the mount of Olives? Which way is north? Where is the hill of Evil Council? And he recollects from what perfect chaos, the beauty and order, the satisfaction and delight arose on the observer when the points of the compass were once fixed and the parts of the picture assumed their places. But in an intellectual and moral prospect, it is still more important; for the eye of reason loves order more than that of the senses.

Now there are two learned doctors which give us exactly contrary directions—Dr. Chalmers and Dr. Emmons. Dr. Chalmers says: "In studying your Bible, it is a question of pure criticism—your grammar and your dictionary is all you need." "No," says Dr. Emmons, "you need something more—you are a rational being; you need a system; for you have an implicit system in your own soul." Thus the two doctors contradict each other. Both good men, both wise men, both in earnest—which shall we follow? For my part, I love my country, and reverence the deep voice that comes from its mountains and hills. I go for the American divine. I believe that his decision is ratified by experience, and comes from the depths of

<sup>1</sup> See Playfair's Second Dissertation on the Progress of Mathematical and Physical Science, page 126.



divine truth. The grammar and the dictionary!! Professor Lee may take the one; and Dr. Pearson, if he will rise from the grave, shall swallow the other.

We have heard it suggested that when Dr. Emmons says you "must have a system," he means really to say, "You must be a Hopkinsian before you understand the Bible." But no! we do not believe he meant this. The words had a deeper meaning in his mouth. They might have meant this—possibly—uttered by Dr. Spring.<sup>1</sup> But Dr. Emmons was made a sectarian by his views of truth; he did not view truth through sectarianism. No man was more independent; no man saw the deeper channel of the stream with a more penetrating eye. Besides, he has precluded the charge by an express declaration: "All these doctrines are plainly and confessedly contained in the Gospel, in some sense or other. *I do not pretend to say in what sense, they are to be understood; but I do not hesitate to say, that they ought to be understood in a sense, which renders them harmonious and consistent with each other.*" See Sermon, page 5. Read the whole.

It will be easy for any one, whose disposition is jealous and whose proclivity to misapprehension is in proportion to his disposition, to pervert what has now been said to a conclusion, as if revelation were imperfect; and as if human reason must prop up divine authority. But this, I apprehend, was not the design of Dr. Emmons. He would allow that the Bible was perfect; but so is nature. We have no fault to find with her symbols. They were established by a perfect God and partake of his infallibility and perfection. And yet how slowly were they interpreted! How gradually did true philosophy dawn on the world! What I contend for is simply this; that as some glimpses of the true system are sometimes found and are always desirable in interpreting the laws of nature; so in understanding the Bible, **THE TRUE SYSTEM IS NEEDED AS A LIGHT TO THE INTERPRETATION.** It will never be found unless it is first anticipated; and he is a benefactor who abridges my labor by putting this necessary torch into my trembling hands—

A little onward lend thy guiding hand  
To these dark steps, a little further on.

And now we would submit with all deference to those whose duty it is to profit by the living and the dead, whether these principles are duly appreciated in our theological seminaries. We have an impression—though it is a very loose one and we bring it forward with infi-

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<sup>1</sup> The late Dr. Samuel Spring of Newburyport.

nite caution—that too much time is spent under the *mere* guidance of the grammar and the dictionary. Our youth sometimes become better verbal critics than theologians. I have no doubt of the learning, the earnestness and the sincerity of our accredited teachers. To suggest vague suspicions is a miserable employment. But if there be any danger, let a most acute observer warn us, who is now in his grave.

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### ARTICLE III.

#### OF SPIRIT AND THE CONSTITUTION OF SPIRITUAL BEINGS.

By George I. Chace, Prof. of Chemistry and Geology, Brown University.

In a former number of this Review, we laid before its readers, what we believed to be the true view of the constitution of matter. We endeavored to show, that in accordance with the principles of sound logic, it must be regarded as having a real existence, as possessing inherent, constitutional properties, and as acting by virtue of those properties. As such a constitution of matter, would at first view, seem to place all physical events under the control of an iron necessity, leaving no room for the influence of prayer or the exercise of that superintending Providence, which according to the teachings of our holy religion, God continually extends over the affairs of this world, it may be well before entering upon the subject of our present Article, to notice briefly, what, were it true, would constitute so serious an objection to the view taken. In doing so, however, we would say at the outset, that we do not propose considering whether it be possible to reconcile this idea of matter with the above Christian doctrines, but whether it presents in connection with those doctrines, any peculiar difficulties which do not equally attach themselves to any other hypothesis capable of explaining the phenomena. Unless this latter question can be answered in the affirmative, the objection, so far as we are concerned, has no weight.

Now we think it is clear that no practical conclusions whatever can be drawn from the supposition, that all the changes of the external world, are brought about by the spontaneous reaction of the elements composing it, which may not, in like manner, be deduced from that established order which we everywhere observe in the succession