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"There he is "

FARMER TOMPKINS

AND HIS

BIBLES.

BY THE

REV., WILLIS J. BEECHER,

PROFESSOR OF THE HEBREW LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN AUBURN
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY.

PHILADELPHIA :
PRESBYTERIAN BOARD OF PUBLICATION,
1334 CHESTNUT STREET.

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FARMER TOMPKINS AND HIS BIBLES.

CHAPTER I.

LET US BE ACQUAINTED.

MY name is Theophilus Luke. I do not ask you, friendly reader, to become my disciple, for I am no sage, but only a plain man, and in years scarcely more than a boy. Nor have I a romantic story to tell you. I have simply passed through certain experiences—experiences of a type which I am persuaded is quite common in this adventurous, wonderful, doubting, inventive century of ours. If I succeed in interesting you, you may like to compare some of my difficulties and deliverances with your own. And it is possible that I may be of service to you, since you or some friend

of yours may need help just at points where I have been so fortunate as to find help.

Quite early in life I was thrown upon my own resources. I had a small amount of property—enough to help me through college without any very hard struggling. My relatives, most of whom were respectable people and Christians by profession, seldom interfered with me. Although none of them were very poor, yet none were very rich, and they had hard work to take care of themselves. They kept some watch over me, but were contented with seeing that I was able, like the rest, to make my own way.

My relatives belonged to several different religious denominations. Some of them were quite strenuous for their distinctive beliefs. I recollect how, when a mere child, I used to sit and hear them argue. Sometimes the discussion would wax warm, and they would not be at all careful to use soft words in regard to the errors of which each

deemed the others guilty. But I think that they never loved each other the less for such passages. Their disputes generally closed with some allusion to the happy future when we shall all see eye to eye, and shall all agree, because we shall all find the perfect truth.

At these times no statement was more frequently made than that "every one must think for himself." This sentiment was often repeated to me by my older relatives as a piece of good advice. Perhaps some of them were anxious to keep me from being influenced by their opponents rather than by themselves. Yet I never doubted that they were sincere in the main in urging me to think for myself. And, indeed, this seemed to me necessary, since, if I let other people do my thinking, I should often be obliged to hold contradictory opinions.

As I grew older my ideas as to what it is to think for one's self became somewhat confused. At one time I understood it to be

thinking contrary to whatever is called orthodox. It then seemed to me that, in order to be independent in thought, I must disbelieve everything which religious people believed, and must doubt everything of which they were certain. This was somewhat awkward, and would have been more so had I been more thorough. But I was not then very deeply in earnest. I had no very powerful convictions of any kind. My prevailing state of mind was simply flippant and frivolous. I delighted in finding what seemed to be objectionable passages in the Bible, and acquired quite a skill in hunting up difficulties. I took particular pleasure in pointing out flaws in the conduct of Christians or in statements of truth made by them. To the best of my recollection, this was not because I consciously disliked either the Bible or Christianity. I was rather moved by a love of saying what seemed to me smart things. I enjoyed seeing some people puzzled and others shocked by my

remarks. I was somewhat quick, and among the people who troubled themselves to talk with me there were but few with whom I was unable successfully to cope. So I came to imagine that I was really a very powerful and original thinker.

At the ripe age of fifteen, and just beginning the study of Latin grammar, I fancied I had reached an eminence from which I could look down upon the results of all the learning and thought of all the ages. I vaguely supposed that I had broken the bonds of the old theologies, and had risen to something higher and nobler. Exactly what the bonds of the old theologies were I did not know. There was not the faintest shadow of a definite notion in my mind as to the precise character of that higher and nobler something to which I had attained. I had picked up the phrases from the vocabulary of an itinerant lecturer, and had afterward heard similar language from a daintily-dressed young clergyman who once preached in our

church, and whom an uncle of mine called a "gosling." The pompous self-confidence of the lecturer and the minister's white fingers quite captivated me. I caught their pet expressions, and fancied that these were exquisitely beautiful. As I used them they were utterly empty. But I was then playing with ideas rather than feeding upon them. The empty shell answered my purpose about as well as if there had been a kernel within. I am afraid that wiser people than I sometimes make the same mistake. Perhaps some of them keep it up through life.

I was not profane or vicious or idle. I did not openly oppose religion; I even attended worship with tolerable regularity. I could have given no good reason for this, any more than for my eccentric notions, but it seemed to me that I was thus doing the fair thing; and when I read how Socrates and other classic personages, while they despised the superstitions in which they had been reared, yet conformed to them, I began

to regard myself as pursuing the same course that Socrates had formerly pursued, and to rejoice in having found a "kindred spirit," as I phrased it, in that great man.

My free-thinking, such as it was, expended itself in glib talk about "prevalent superstitions," and "bigotry," and "intolerance," and "antiquated notions," and "strait-laced Puritanism," and in the bandying about of other like popular phrases. To be sure, I did not understand the meaning of these terms, but the free use of them in conversation seemed to me to be the mark of a liberal mind. I recently heard a doctor of divinity speak of the current notions of heaven as "wooden notions." If I had heard this a few years since, I should at once have worshiped the man as a great genius. My present opinion is that there is no surer indication of a person's having wooden brains than his attributing wooden brains to the great body of his fellows. But I once had different notions. Some one had told

me that Carlyle had said that a certain king ruled some "millions of subjects, mostly fools." It was the only thing that I had then heard about Carlyle, but I fancied that I saw in this one statement sufficient proof that Carlyle, like Socrates and myself, was one of the exceptional people who are not fools.

One day, when the Mormons, who had a few adherents in our neighborhood, applied for the use of our church in which to hold a meeting, and were refused, I took it into my head to regard them as greatly aggrieved, and rattled away about the spirit of persecution being just as rife now as in the Dark Ages. On this occasion one of the deacons, an old family friend, told me that I was a fool, and I began forthwith to glory in my having already become a martyr for the sake of my liberal opinions.

Up to this time I had read no books opposed to Christianity. In conversation with various people, in occasional articles in news-

papers and in numerous lectures on phrenology, on Spiritualism, on the various reforms and on other topics, I had come into contact with the prevailing irreligious cant of the day, and had become affected by it. But I had read no connected or thorough treatise on the subject. I suppose it was because none had fallen in my way. But when I entered college, the libraries gave me access to abundant literature of this kind. Fortunately for me, perhaps, the first infidel works that I read were so palpably unfair that I could not be deceived by them. I have since seen many that were more specious, and therefore more dangerous. But those which I first read were of such a stamp as to open my eyes to the fact that the assailants of revealed religion may be bigoted and intolerant and superstitious as well as its defenders.

With this I changed my notion as to what constituted "thinking for myself." The idea of differing with orthodox people had formerly been prominent, but that of

differing with everybody now became so. I do not believe that I had ever been really ready to give up the Bible or the evangelical doctrines which I had learned when a child. It was sport for me to attack them when I was among people who believed in them, and I took great credit to myself for my boldness in doing so, but I suspect that if any one else had been the assailant I should have taken up arms in their defence, Perhaps I was like my friend Simpson's little four-year-old girl, who scolds him, and pulls his hair, and twists his nose, and is delighted if she can make him cry out with pain, but is ready with tongue and nails, like an infant Fury, to defend him against any one else that should so much as offer to complain of him. She acts thus partly because she loves him; but I am afraid that I did not then love religion.

Whatever my disposition might formerly have been, I now, at least, prided myself on never taking the same view with any one

else. When I heard anything said against the Bible, I took sides in its favor; but I attacked it when its claims were urged upon me. It seemed to me that I was thus vindicating my claim to be called an independent thinker. By disagreeing with all I would prove that I did not borrow from any. It never occurred to me that two men, thinking independently, might reach the same results just as well as reach opposite results. I did not notice that this principle was assumed in every lesson I learned; so that the learning of every lesson involved an unconscious denial of the view I held about thinking for myself. It also escaped me that the thoughtless contradiction of every proposition is exactly as slavish as the thoughtless acceptance of every proposition. In foolish ignorance of all these considerations, I set myself up, for the sake of a fancied independence, as a mental Ishmael, with my hand against every man and every man's hand against me.

Meanwhile, I grew conscious that this

habit of flippant doubt was beginning to take a deeper hold of my nature. It was becoming a serious affair, and no longer a mere jest. I was losing faith in everything. I felt a growing recklessness in all directions. I had almost come really to believe that the Bible was not trustworthy, and I was certain that if its religion could not be relied upon no other could.

I tremble as I look back upon this crisis of my life. My light, superficial, careless ways of thinking had not hitherto had a very perceptible effect upon my character, but they had hindered me from forming deep and true convictions concerning religion and morals, and now I was fairly afloat without compass or rudder. The lightest breath was enough to waft me toward the whirlpools of utter doubt and of universal mistrust, misanthropy and uselessness. My powers of discrimination, although maturing and trained by my daily studies, were so blunted by my habits of doubt and dishon-

est discussion that I hardly knew whether I believed anything or not. It is a wonder that I had not become utterly bewildered and lost. Very few escape, I think, who have placed themselves where I then was.

Providentially, I was so situated that I was compelled to exert myself in order, on my small means, to complete my college course. Debts were realities; hard work was a reality; careful economizing was a reality. I think that this perpetual contact and struggle with stern facts had something to do with rescuing me from complete nihilism.

I was in this frame of mind, with some honest doubts and many flippant ones, and not wholly able to distinguish those which were real from those which were illusory, when I went to spend one of my long vacations with Farmer Tompkins, who had married an aunt of mine, but with whom I had previously been but little acquainted.

CHAPTER II.

FARMER TOMPKINS.

FARMER TOMPKINS was one of those curious compounds of eccentricity and good sense which occasionally spring from our English Puritan stock. He was of medium size, square built and with a slightly stooping figure. When I first knew him, his hair and beard were of mixed dark and gray. The hair would not stay parted, though he combed it a dozen times a day, and no amount of stroking and brushing could coax the rugged beard into smoothness. The roughness of his skin gave to his face a more scarred and wrinkled look than it would otherwise have worn. His coat collar was usually turned under, and one leg of his pantaloons had a propensity for hitching up

to the top of his boot. Yet he was always scrupulously clean. His hands were brown and hard, but no particle of dirt was allowed to remain on them after the day's work was done. His two lips were always closely shaven. Once every day, at least, his garments were carefully put on with the conscientious intention of having them in perfect order. They did not long stay in order. Various sudden movements and unconscious wriggings would soon bring them into all sorts of odd shapes. But this was because the farmer couldn't help it. He disliked to be either queer in dress or eccentric in manner. He constantly struggled against certain tendencies in this direction which came to him from inherited temperament and early training, but the tendencies would often get the better of him.

For the rest, he was well-to-do, though not rich. From the time of his marriage he had, to use his own phrase, "retired on half work." He rose early in the morning,

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stumped about the farm all the forenoon, and, unless there was company in the house, ate dinner with the farm-hands at twelve o'clock. After dinner, however, he dressed, and occupied the afternoon with reading or visiting, or in various offices of business or charity.

The farmer had a theory that "growin'" is what makes the difference between the mind of a human being and that of a brute, and from this theory he drew the inference that if a man lets his mind stop growing he makes a beast of himself.

He had certain noticeable views as to the history of the growth of his own mind. To these he did not often give utterance, even among his most intimate friends. He seemed to be conscious that right here he had a weakness which might expose him to ridicule, and it was therefore very difficult to persuade him to talk about himself. Yet in these very theories of his in regard to his own training of himself lay certain topics on which he was

peculiarly interested and peculiarly interesting. Hence, on the rare occasions when he indulged himself in this line of talk, he was apt to become perfectly garrulous. I can only reproduce the outline of his story; I wish that I could also present the peculiar changes of accent and manner and attitude which rendered the details so full of meaning as they fell from his lips.

He would begin by pointing to a certain lot "across the creek," which, directly after it was cleared, had been exhausted by a rapid succession of crops, and was in this condition when the farm fell into his hands. It was then covered with stones. You could nowhere put in a plough six inches without turning up the subsoil. Nothing would grow there but Canada thistles and red sorrel. He found that land was becoming so valuable that he could not afford to have this field thus lying idle. So he had ditches dug and blinded with the surface stones. Then he ploughed in forty loads of manure

to the acre. Then more ditches were cut, and blinded with the stones which the plough had turned up. For two or three years the weeds, which seemed wonderfully to relish the draining and fertilizing, disputed with the crops for the possession of the soil. But they were conquered after a while, for no living creatures, animal or vegetable, can long maintain themselves against a man that is in earnest, and the field at length became as level and rich a piece of meadow "as ever two horses drew a machine over."

This bit of enterprise, according to the old man's account of himself, awoke within him certain energies that had till then lain dormant. He was led to say to himself, "Tompkins, your brains are like that lot across the creek. They are shallow. The hardpan comes right up to the top. What soil there is is mighty cold and poor. And you are just running your brains out by your style of cultivating them. The only crops you ever try to get from them are

crops of farming thoughts to make money out of, and yet there must be some way of underdraining them, and clearing out the stones and weeds, and enriching them, and raising better harvests from them than you can ever get from any other soil." As it was, he reflected that although he had been "religious" from his very childhood, and went regularly to church and prayer-meeting, yet nobody ever asked him to lead in prayer or teach a Sunday-school class. He called to mind that, although he was the richest bachelor in the township, the young women were yet evidently less desirous of his company than that of many of the other unmarried men. In fine, he awoke to the consciousness that he was a rough-mannered man whom people did not regard as very bright, and whose unwonted enterprise in farming had even caused no small surprise among his neighbors. So Farmer Tompkins concluded that he would deal by himself just as he was dealing by the meadow across

the creek, and maybe he would make it pay as well.

He had pretty much forgotten about the books he used to study or hear of at school, and also had an idea that at all events the Bible must be the best volume to begin with. He was confronted at the very outset of his Bible study with the text, "It is not good that the man should be alone." Looking around for a "help meet for him," he thought of my aunt, who was then just completing her second decade of service as a timid country schoolma'am. His first awkward, palpitating approaches amazed the dear spinster, and nearly frightened her out of her wits. According to his version of the story, however, she "somehow give him an idea that she would like to marry him, if they could only both take time to fall in love first." His attentions to her began to attract the notice and awaken the merriment of the village folks. This, instead of making them ashamed one of the other, served

to drive them closer together. At length, in the plenitude of a happy affection, they were married. After the honeymoon they two arranged a plan for the cultivation of his mind. In this arrangement her part was "to clear out the stumps and thistles and other rubbish," or, in other words, to correct his bad grammar and ungainly ways; while he was to "haul on the dressin' and put in the crops"—that is, to devote some part of every day to reading, study, going into society, and the like.

He persevered in this plan, and reaped the benefit. Of course one who begins to seek culture at forty can hardly expect to become as symmetrical as if he had commenced earlier. The farmer is a strange medley of his present self and his former self. He had been married twelve or thirteen years at the time of my visit, and was then accustomed to say that a dozen years before he had been nothing but a woodchuck, knowing how to dig in the ground and eat clover,

but knowing nothing else, and that he was now half man and half woodchuck.

It was sometimes comical, as it was always entertaining, to hear him talk. For half an hour at a time he would use the purest English, without a mistake or a false articulation, and then, in a moment of excitement, would suddenly return to the provincialisms to which he had formerly been accustomed. He was somewhat apt to use the latter when speaking of farm affairs, and pure English when speaking of books or religion. He tried to avoid this. Sometimes, seeing people's eyes twinkle, he would correct himself, but he would presently forget again. I, for one, was glad that he did. It gave piquancy to whatever he said. In reality, he spoke two different dialects of English—a book dialect and a farm dialect; and as he was famous for illustrating religious and social truths by facts taken from agriculture, he was apt, when much interested, to keep passing from one dialect to the other. To stran-

gers this seemed very peculiar, but we who knew him soon got used to it.

Farmer Tompkins had fitted up and furnished the old farmhouse more handsomely than most similar houses, and did everything in his power to make my aunt happy. And happy, in the main, she was, although greatly troubled by some characteristics of the man which every schoolboy thoroughly understood, but which never ceased to puzzle her. While undemonstrative in public, they were by their own fireside the most dotting couple I ever knew. But it always seemed to me that my aunt was half afraid that her late-gained happiness was an illusion, and that she would wake up some morning to find that husband and home had vanished like a dream. At any rate, he was sometimes offended at her being so fearful of offending him, and he appeared to think that this was the only fault he had to find with her. But she was frequently in consternation regarding him. He was fond of

having small boys come to see him, and would tickle and tease and scold them in a way that made the poor woman's blood run cold. And it made her shudder to see how saucily the boys always answered him back, and what sharp return tricks they played on him. But the boys somehow always went away good natured, and were sure to come again. For my own part, dearly as I loved my aunt, who was, in the main, quite a superior woman, I never could bear to see a wife afraid of her husband. It looks as if she took him for a brute or a curmudgeon ; and if I had such a wife, I think I should be apt to become what she took me for.

After a while people began to discover that Farmer Tompkins possessed within his rough exterior a large fund of good sense. Some of them winked and giggled when it was announced that he would open a Bible class at the village church, but his class soon filled up, and his quiet, quaint statements of Scripture truth came to be regularly re-

peated and talked about in nearly every house in the neighborhood. In two or three years more it became quite a custom to send him as delegate to public religious gatherings, where his soundness of view, combined with his peculiarities, gave him a marked local celebrity.

CHAPTER III.

UNCLE AND NEPHEW.

NONE afternoon, shortly after I reached the farm, as I was walking with my uncle through a young orchard which he had set out a few years before, he suddenly stopped, and exclaimed,

“There he is!”

For a moment I saw nothing. But my uncle pulled out his sharp pocket-knife, and kneeling by a thrifty-looking tree, thrust the point into the bark. Then I noticed a few minute grains of dark sawdust on the ground beneath, and knew that he was cutting in search of a little worm that had attacked the tree and was endangering its life. The intruder was presently dislodged. The farmer put up his knife, and turning his eyes full on mine, abruptly said :

“Young man, I’ve noticed a good deal of bark dust layin’ around *your* roots.”

Now, strangely enough, I myself had been thinking precisely the same thought. Hence, accustomed as I was to his gruff manner, I could not help starting and coloring. But I quickly recovered myself, and rejoined:

“What do you mean by that?”

“I mean that a fly called self-conceit settled on you long ago, and that you’ve been fly-blown these two years, and that it’s now hatching out into a worm of skepticism that will girdle your whole trunk before long if you’re not careful.”

“Where did you get your information?” I tartly replied.

“No, no; don’t be angry. I’ve no more right to interfere with your opinions than you with mine; but whenever I see signs of a borer, out comes my jack-knife. I keep it sharp for that purpose. You see, the sharper it is, the less it hurts. And I can’t

bear to see a thrifty young tree going to ruin without trying to help it."

While the man was speaking, all his oddity for the time being entirely vanished. The face whose glance met mine was an earnest, pleading face. It struck me that for the moment he was transfigured. There was something grand in him of which I had never before been sensible. Meanwhile, several different impulses were struggling within me. At first I thought I would either preserve a constrained silence or turn the conversation as from a disagreeable subject. Then it occurred to me to make the shrewd, kind old man my confidant, and tell him of my inner struggles, in the hope that he might know how to help me. Then my old habits resumed their sway, and it seemed that it would be a fine thing to try a passage at arms with him, and see if I could not silence him, as I had often silenced others. I hardly know which of these impulses was uppermost when I replied :

“You seem very coolly to assume that I am going to destruction.”

“Well, I ask your pardon. I’ve no right to assume any such thing. But I was afraid for you, and in hopes you’d let me try and help you.”

Now, I felt that I needed help. There was something thoroughly genuine about this man which I did not find in every one. I could not but see that his character contained elements of strength and stability which mine lacked. It seemed likely that he might assist me if I would let him. Stoical young man that I was, I felt a longing to throw myself into his arms and cry like a silly girl. But on the other hand, I was no sooner conscious of this feeling than I was ashamed of it. I had never before experienced precisely such emotions. I was wholly embarrassed and unmanned, and yet endeavoring to maintain an outward appearance of coolness and self-control.

“Indeed,” I replied, trying to look as un-

concerned and philosophical as I could, "I don't mind your knowing that I have some doubts in regard to the common notions about the Bible."

I fully expected that this avowal would draw forth a rebuke to which I would reply by a witty retort, and thus end the interview. But to my surprise, he seemed neither astonished nor shocked. His reply suggested nothing more than that he took an interest in ascertaining my opinions, and would like to compare views with me. For an instant our attitude was that of mutual condescension. I, the classically trained scholar, let myself down to the level of him, the uneducated farmer, and he, the man of experience, came down to the level of me, the inexperienced boy. As I afterward became better acquainted with the man, I found out how ludicrous it had been for me to have condescended to him, for in his rude but thorough way he was a far better scholar than I. At the time of which I am now

speaking, however, he accepted my condescension, and thus enabled me to preserve my self-respect and prevented me from angrily and abruptly terminating the discussion.

After a few moments of talk he asked,

“Do you doubt the main facts in regard to the Bible, or only some of the less important details?”

The distinction was new to me. I had imagined that if it can be proved that the Book of Chronicles contradicts the Book of Kings in regard to Solomon's number of stalls for chariot-horses, then the whole edifice of revealed religion, Christian morality and all, must come tumbling down. As I had been in the habit of looking at the matter, if a defender of religion had made some infelicitous statement, the overthrow of that statement was equivalent to the overthrow of the cause he had espoused. It now occurred to me for the first time that a great system of truth might retain its in-

tegrity in spite of a thousand mistakes and inaccuracies that had become incidentally connected with it. Nevertheless, I ventured to answer :

“Some, at least, of the main facts.”

“For instance?”

By this time I had become strangely excited. Hardly aware that I was turning the dialogue into a monologue, I exclaimed :

“I have heard a minister in controversy pin his opponent down to the exact words of some Scripture text. I have heard such a one declare that one text is as good as a thousand for settling any point of doctrine. I have heard him insist that the passage must be read just as it stands, without changing a jot or tittle. Then a few minutes later I have heard the same man propose a new rendering or a fresh interpretation or a varied reading. I have heard a Christian scholar praise our received version as nearly perfect, and another, of the same religious persuasion, criticise it as full of de-

fects. I have been told that the Bible is handed down to us free from error as the apostles and prophets wrote it, and yet I hear of 'corrupt readings' and of the 'efforts' of scholars to 'improve the text.' I have been informed that it is a remarkably clear, unequivocal rule of duty, and I have heard also that 'men can prove anything they please from the Scriptures.' Some of the ablest pieces of reasoning I ever read were devoted to proving the authenticity and divine authority of the sacred books. But these acute logicians usually set out with the confident assertion that 'the books of the Bible were written by the men whose names they bear.' Yet some of the books do not bear the names of any author. Then I turn to any standard commentary, and ascertain that no one certainly knows who wrote Job or the Kings or the Hebrews or James or Jude."

I stopped here, half vexed at my own impetuosity and half pleased at finding my-

self so fluent. My talking had also somewhat relieved the intensity of my feelings.

Mr. Tompkins had listened patiently, and now replied :

“Did it ever strike you that many well-informed professional religious teachers hardly seem aware that these perplexities exist?”

“Yes; and don't that prove them to be hypocrites who shut their eyes to difficulties which every one else sees as plainly as the daylight?”

“Not necessarily. It is more charitable to suppose that their studies have given them such a grasp of the whole subject that for them the difficulties do not exist. The difficulties may be only apparent, and not real, and the professional student as he has investigated may have seen them all vanish, until not one is left. To him the difficulties have ceased to exist.”

“Well,” said I, “I wish some one would make me see as much.”

“I see,” replied the farmer, “I shall have to show you my *Biblearium*.”

“Your *Biblearium*?” I said. “What is that?”

And just then some visitors drove in at the larger gate of the door-yard, and we hastened to meet them.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BIBLEARIUM.

DIRECTLY after dinner the next day my friend tilted his chair back on two legs, drew his right knee up with his left hand, began picking his teeth with a fork, and said :

“ Now, youngster, I reckon we had better take a look at that Biblearium.”

“ Three stumps and two thistles,” quietly remarked Mrs. Tompkins.

I did not then understand these cabalistic words, but they were instantly followed by a hearty “ Thank you !” from Tompkins. Down went the chair upon its proper complement of legs ; up came the feet and knees to a strictly proper position ; the fork resumed its place on the table, and an orange-wood tooth-pick was produced from some-

where. Except that his clothing had got twisted all out of place, the old man became in a moment the very pink of gentility.

I afterward learned what the reader has perhaps already guessed—that “thistle,” in the domestic dialect of the Tompkins pair, signified an impropriety of language, and “stump” an impropriety of bodily habit. For example, the three “stumps” to which Mrs. Tompkins had just alluded were the tilted chair, the nursed knee and the fork tooth-pick, and the two “thistles” were the words “youngster” and “reckon,” in the connection in which her husband had just used them. All this I did not learn until after the time of which I am now speaking, but I suspected something of it as the good man assumed a genteel position, flushed a little, and then addressed me again in a manner that was half playful and half stately :

“ Shall I have the pleasure this afternoon of showing Mr. Luke my collection of Bibles ?”

I could not help mimicking his manner as I replied :

“I shall be delighted to see them.”

I had no purpose in this—it was hardly voluntary ; but it resulted in our bursting into a hearty laugh, in which even my timid aunt joined. Had the situation been far more embarrassed than it was, that laugh must have relieved it. When it was over, Mr. Tompkins said :

“Let me first tell you its history.”

And for a few moments no gentleman born could have been more refined in manner or more choice in language :

“For more than twenty years past people from the college and from elsewhere have been in the habit of wandering over this part of the country to make collections for their cabinets. At first I hardly knew what to think of it, but I soon learned about them. If I saw a dainty-complexioned young fellow with a tin can slung at his side peering among the weeds as if he had lost

something, I knew he was botanizing. If another carried a hammer, I recognized him as a geologist or mineralogist looking for fossils and crystals and the like. If another had a wooden pail and went poking around among the stones and mud of the brook, I knew that he was after fresh-water shells. I used frequently to meet these people and talk with them. Some of them were silly enough, but others were as sensible and entertaining as any people I ever met. I was not long in finding out that they expected to label the specimens they obtained, and arrange them on shelves, in classes, along with other specimens from other parts of the world, and thus study them, and learn something about the principles on which this earth of ours is constructed. I saw a great many of these folks, for our section of country is regarded as peculiarly rich in the materials for natural history. To my surprise, I discovered that many of them had had no better schooling than I, although others were

highly educated. I soon got some notions as to the kinds of specimens they most prized; and as I knew the country better than they did, I was frequently able to be of service to them. Many a pleasant hour have I spent in their company. Sometimes they have showed me wonders that I should never have dreamed of in the structure of some insect or shell or bit of stone.

“One of these men, a rough, uncultivated fellow, by the name of Curr, was a skeptic. He had no more manners than the animal whose name sounds like his. He was careless and slovenly in dress, though he always took pains to be clean, because, as he said, it was unhealthy not to be so. But he was sharp and witty in his talk, and always ready to do a good turn, and he had the keenest pair of eyes of them all for a new butterfly, or for a weed or bug or fossil that nobody had ever seen before. He was as eager as a child, and he took it for granted that you knew just as much about science

as he did, and that you had as much enthusiasm for it as he. But I think that the thing which most of all made him pleasant was his being always ready to be helped without ever being really helpless.

“ At all events, Curr and I took quite a liking to each other. Perhaps it was because

‘Birds of a feather
Flock together,’

and perhaps not, but we grew very intimate. He would come to the house when he was collecting, and take supper and stay all night. You see, I was entirely at home with him. He had no grand ways to make me feel distant. Some of the others had. They didn't mean it. They tried hard to be affable, and it was just their trying so hard that spoiled it; the *effort* showed in spite of them. Their manner said as plainly as could be: ‘Now, you are a rough country boor, and we must accommodate ourselves to you. We must come down to your level.’

I suppose it was all right. Of course they were a great way above me. They were very kind to take any interest in me, and to condescend for that purpose, but, after all, it wasn't agreeable. I was as polite as I knew how to be, but I always felt constrained and awkward. I was glad to meet them, and usually almost as glad to get rid of them.

“And, by the way, young man, here's a bit of advice for you: *Never come down to anybody.* Everybody has two sides on which you can approach him. Go to him from one direction, and he may be either above you or below you, but from the other direction every man, woman and child, rich or poor, black, white or yellow, is exactly on your level. And it is generally best to approach them from the level side. This is true even of people who are above you. No decent man likes to have a fellow-man cringe to him; and if a man prefers to have you crawl up to him, instead of meeting him as an equal, it may be a question whether it

isn't mean for you to gratify him. But be this as it may, people don't like to have you look down upon them. They may sometimes get so much accustomed to it that they don't mind it. Some may be so degraded that they prefer a rich man's kick to a poor man's hand-shake. They may be more likely to do what you want if you come to them from the up-hill side, but you can't get at their hearts unless you come from the level side. And the point is not to descend to their plane, but to make your approaches from the direction in which you are already on their plane. On the ground of social position you may be above them; on the ground of our common humanity you are not, and never can be. Go to them, then, on the ground of our common humanity.

“Well, I'm running off into a lecture, just as if you were a Bible class and I couldn't get you to answer questions. I was saying that most of my scientific friends,

instead of stepping right up to me, as one man to another, undertook to slide sweetly down to within my reach from their heights of superior culture. They were cultivated gentlemen, and I was a curious specimen of a clodhopper. So long as they looked at the matter in this light we could not come close together, for clodhoppers and gentlemen are beings of different kinds. If we could all only have remembered that we were men, *that* would have brought us at once on common ground. But instead of this, they would try to forget that they were gentlemen and I was a clodhopper. They meant well, but we should have got on more comfortably if they had held themselves aloof, and had associated with me only as gentlemen associate with clodhoppers. This making believe that they thought I was a fine gentleman, when they knew and I knew that they did not think so, was very embarrassing.

“With Curr, as with some of the rest, it

was different; I always felt unconstrained in his company. After supper he would open his cases and show me what he had gathered. I used to look and listen with a sort of blind wonder, like that which I feel when I hear music or see pictures that I know are too fine for me to appreciate. But I liked to hear him talk; and though I did not know enough to understand more than half he said, I picked up many a bit of curious and useful information.

“But it pained me to notice that he never seemed to look higher than to what he called ‘nature.’ You’ve read Mr. Cooper’s stories that describe the character named Leatherstocking, who is always finding something in the woods and streams and habits of animals to remind him of the great Being who created and cares for all things. I don’t often read novels, but I got interested in one of those. Now, what troubled me about my friend Curr was that he wasn’t a bit like Leatherstocking. He never alluded to the

Creator in any way. I noticed that at family prayers he just sat still, with a queer twinkle in his eye that made me feel for the moment farther from him than from the weakest dandy that ever wore fine clothes and made fun of plain men. I felt badly about this. I was unwilling to give him up. So one day I asked him about his religious views. His reply was an outburst of anger. He asked me if I had ever heard him swear, and I answered that I had not. He wanted to know if I had ever heard him speak a light word concerning what I called religion, and I said, No. He demanded whether he had not always been respectful when we 'read our book and went down on our knees,' which was his way of describing our custom of family prayer, and I admitted that he had. Then he declared that he had been in the habit of doing 'a big business in the line of profane swearing,' particularly whenever he came within hearing of the 'chaps that call themselves ministers of the gospel.'

He said that he was given to picking flaws in 'that holy book of yourn,' as he called the Bible. He told me that he hated the whole concern as bad as he hated the devil himself, or, rather, as he should hate the devil if he supposed there was any devil; which he didn't, for people couldn't fool him with their superstitions. But when he became acquainted with me, he added, he had said to himself that I was a 'genuine living specimen of the genus *pious*.' He had seen a dozen or two fossils of that genus before, but I was about the first live one he had ever come across. So, for my sake, he had been careful. He had bottled up the swearing and the hinting, and had taken pains not to let the cork fly out while I was around. More than that, he had even resolved to be civil to my minister on my account, and since then he had not blasphemed within two miles of my house, not even when he saw a white neckcloth. A few days previously our pastor had met him and said some-

thing to him about the Creator whose works he was studying, and he had held on so hard to keep himself from cursing that he had crushed in his hand the finest helix he ever found in these parts; and he had even refrained from administering oaths to himself on that subject after he was left alone. He added that he had studied the art of shocking pious feelings, and prided himself on being able to do it more scientifically than any other man he knew. He had been restraining himself solely out of regard to me. And now I had spoiled it all, and brought matters to an explosion.

“And with that he burst into a string of oaths horrid enough to justify his boast that he had studied the art of profane swearing and become a scientific and practiced blasphemer. His imprecations broke around my head like a thunder-storm I was out in once, when six trees were struck within forty rods of where I was standing. I saw that it was useless now to try to pacify him. In fact, I

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could not feel that I had done him any wrong. And, at all events, there's no use in being tender when you take hold of a nettle. So I told him very plainly that I had not meant to offend him, and was sorry if I had given him offence, but that the Bible was not a humbug, and that prayer was a reality; and that, if he had looked for them half as carefully as he was in the habit of looking for caterpillars and snails, he would have found hundreds of living specimens of what he called 'the genus pious,' all of them better than I.

"He seemed not very much displeased, but put on a cold look, and said:

"How do you know that the Bible isn't a humbug?"

"Just as I know anything,' I told him.

"No, you don't,' said he. 'I know the shape of these shells, because I can see it with my eyes. You can't see with your eyes that the Bible is the word of God. And I know by my senses where I got

them and by the same evidence I know that they are like certain other shells, and should be classed with them.'

"I replied that I knew on his testimony where he got the shells—that I was just as certain of it as he was—and that I had the right to take the same kind of proof, namely, the testimony of competent men, as to the authority of the Bible."

Just then a message came asking the farmer to go immediately and pray with a sick neighbor. He hastily promised to finish telling me about Mr. Curr at some other time, and only added that his talks with that worthy had suggested to him the idea of forming a collection of Bibles and of other things having reference to the Bible, just as his scientific friends made their collections of plants and minerals. He had since learned—what he did not know when he began—that there are in existence in different parts of the world splendid collections of this kind. He had at first only a vague

idea that he could make such a collection, just as Mr. Curr gathered insects and shells and fossils, and that there was something which might be learned from doing so.. He had succeeded beyond his expectations; and just as he heard other people talk about their herbariums and aquariums, so he talked about his *Biblearium*.

CHAPTER V.

AN ORIGINAL STUDY.

BY dinner-time the next day my curiosity had become more aroused than I cared to show in regard to my friend's Biblearium. Directly after dinner, without making any words about it, he led the way to the room he called his "library." I had never been in it before ; and although, but a few days previous to this, in the midst of college life, I had imagined myself prematurely old and dead to all boyish feeling, I now found, partly to my delight and greatly to my confusion, that I was as eager as a child.

The room contained several large cases of books and curiosities. The books were mostly on either agriculture or religion, but there was a pretty good sprinkling of

standard literary works. The appliances were not those of a carefully trained scholar, yet they hinted at no small amount of study and hard thinking.

One case was exclusively devoted to Bibles, and another to various curiosities directly illustrating the Bible and religious facts. Mr. Tompkins had already gathered several hundred different Bibles, Testaments and parts of the Bible. There were not many rare volumes or editions; it was the collection of a plain man, and not of a virtuoso. Most of the volumes were in English, although there were forty or fifty in other languages. Most of the English volumes were of the whole or parts of our King James version, but there were copies of several other versions. The editions of the American Bible Society, and other editions printed in this country, were best represented, yet not to the exclusion of editions printed abroad. In short, it was just such a collection as any man could make if he chose

to devote to it a few hours every month for five or six years, and a few hundred dollars.

After looking at it for a while, and examining some of the more interesting specimens, I said to my friend :

“I believe I like your collection quite as well as if it was made up of minerals and plants. But what has it to do with doubts like those of Mr. Curr and myself?”

Now, in saying this I was breaking a resolution I had formed, which was that I would not again introduce these subjects in the presence of Mr. Tompkins. If we must talk about them, I would wait and let him begin, and would thus have the advantage of acting wholly on the defensive. I had thought the matter over, and deliberately resolved upon this course; and here I was taking the very first opportunity to depart from the course resolved upon. In this, as well as in my unwonted eagerness and curiosity, of which I have just spoken, I acted, of course, with perfect freedom, but I seemed,

even at the time, to be conscious that I was influenced by something outside of myself; and as I now look back to those days, I have no doubt that the Holy Spirit of God was then leading me by a path which I knew not, and for this I thank the Lord.

I suspect that my plain but shrewd old friend understood my state of mind better than I understood it myself. At all events, he smiled as he replied :

“For instance, Mr. Curr used to declare that by the testimony of Christian scholars themselves a great many ‘various readings’ and ‘corrupt readings’ have crept into the Greek and Hebrew copies of the Scriptures. ‘Hence,’ he used to say, ‘these men themselves acknowledge that they don’t know what the true reading of the Bible is, and how can they call such a book infallible?’ And I have an idea that you got ready the other day to tell me just about the same thing.”

“I certainly did,” replied I; “but what

has a collection of English Bibles to do with that?"

"We shall see," said he. "I was terribly puzzled myself over that difficulty. I got help enough from books and ministers to convince me that the difficulty wasn't real, but I could never quite see how it wasn't real until I worked it out among my English Bibles. That was not what I got them together for, but I got that out of them."

And then he covered the table and desk and part of the floor with open Bibles. He made me notice what I had known before, but had never realized until then—that no two editions were precisely alike. Some had commentaries or marginal columns, while others had not. Some marked by Italics the words that had been supplied in translating, while others omitted this mark. Some enclosed disputed passages in brackets—such passages, for instance, as ["There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word and the Holy Ghost; and these three



The Billiarium.

are one.]"* Others left such passages undistinguished. Such words as *music* were spelled in some editions with a final *k*, and in others without; and such words as *ancient*, or *antient*, sometimes with *c* for the middle letter, and sometimes with *t*. In some editions words like *worshipped*, *traveler*, doubled the *p* or the *l*, and in others they did not. In some *fulfill* closed with one *l*, and in others with two. Some editions had *labor*, *neighbor*, *favor*, and so forth, while others had *neighbour*, *labour*, *favour*, and so forth. Some copies had words imperfectly printed, so that, taken by themselves, they would read differently from the other copies. In others words had become changed by being worn or blotted. A few words had even been differently printed in the different editions; where the newer copies read "a hundred measures of wheat," "a hundred measures of oil," the older copies read "an hundred." In the tenth chapter and twenty-

* 1 John v. 7.

ninth verse of the Gospel by John, some of the Bibles had the words, "*None* is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand," and others, "*No man* is able." In the passage, "Enter ye in at the strait gate," and elsewhere where the word strait occurs in the sense of narrow, many of the older copies had the spelling *straight*. In Acts, fourth chapter, thirty-second verse, "Neither said any of them that aught of the things which he possessed was his own," and in similar passages, very many of the editions had *ought* for *aight*. So the opposite word *naught* was spelled by some of the editors with an *a* and by some with an *o*. In the Oxford Pearl Octavo Reference Bible of 1858 the passage Jeremiah xxxi. 15 omits the *c* from the proper name *Rachel*.

"Now, Mr. Curr used to say," remarked Mr. Tompkins, "that I had to take religious facts on trust, while in science he believed nothing that he could not verify by his senses. But here are some facts which we

can see with our eyes as plainly as he could see the variations in form of quartz crystals."

"Certainly," I replied, wondering whither all this tended.

"And after what we have just observed by the aid of our senses, I suppose that no scientific man would object to our taking testimony as to whether other people have observed similar facts."

"Nobody could object to that," I said; "and if we find that they have, it will confirm even the evidence of our senses, although that is already entirely sufficient to prove the point."

"Then we need not waste much time here. We will simply examine a single respectable witness, and will take the one that comes handiest."

With that he handed me a magazine, and asked me to read a short article that he pointed out. It stated that an edition of the Scriptures was published two hundred years ago in England which has ever since been

known as the "Adulterous Bible," because the word *not* was omitted from the seventh commandment; that another edition, of nearly the same date, the "Pearl Bible," was full of *errata*, of which the following is a specimen: "Know ye not the ungodly *shall* inherit the kingdom of God?" that Bibles were once printed which affirmed that "all Scripture is profitable for destruction;" that another edition is called the "Vinegar Bible," because in the title to the twentieth chapter of Luke "the parable of the *vineyard*" is printed, "the parable of the *vinegar*;" that in one of the editions of the Anglican prayer-book appeared the following scriptural citation: "We shall not all die, but we shall all be *hanged*, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye;" that Sterne summed up three thousand six hundred faults in the printed Bibles of London; that Peter Hastie, of New York, discovered above one thousand errors of spelling, punctuation and syntax in a so-called immaculate

English edition; that another is said to contain six thousand blunders; that the University of Oxford had a standing offer of a guinea for each and every error that might be found in their edition, and that for many years no one claimed the reward, but recently an error had been discovered and corrected.

“Now, Mr. Luke, bring your ‘logic’ and ‘laws of evidence’ to bear on that, and tell us how much it is worth as testimony.”

“It looks plausible, and must be accepted as probably true,” said I; “but as yet we know too little of the witness to take his statements as certainly true until we have first verified them.”

“Well, you and I have partly verified some of them in looking at this floorful of Bibles. *I* have verified some of the others by observation, and still others by the testimony of other witnesses. Now, take my testimony for just what you regard it as worth, and then take the case just as it stands, on the evidence

we have examined. Give the opposition the benefit of every doubt, and how stands the question of the existence of various readings in our current editions of the King James English Bible?"

"It is impossible to doubt their existence," I replied.

"How many of them are there? Can we count them by thousands?"

"By tens of thousands, at least."

"Now, will you pick out the most accurately-printed Bible I have here?"

I selected a carefully-printed Oxford edition.

"Are you sure that that is the best?"

"I am sure that it is one of the best."

"Are you *scientifically* sure of it?"

"As certain as I am of any fact of science."

"How are you certain?"

"I know that the Oxford editions are reputed to be among the best. I have carefully examined this copy, and find that it is

not defective. I also noticed that it has evidently been prepared with more pains than most of the others. And when we compared readings, and the editions differed, at least nine-tenths of them usually agreed with this. And—”

Here I hesitated, and Tompkins instantly said :

“ Well, you have given reasons enough. Now, will you pick out the poorest Bible I have here ?”

I made a selection.

“ Are you scientifically sure ?”

“ Just as I know the other to be one of the best I know this to be one of the poorest, for it is full of blunders, and differs more than any one I noticed from most of the others.”

“ Would you say, then, that it is a corrupt copy ?”

“ Very corrupt.”

“ Is there any difficulty in ascertaining these facts, so as to be certain of them ?”

“None whatever.”

“Are you sure that the two, and all the other copies of the received translation that we have examined, are copies of the same original?”

“They must be. Otherwise, they could not be so nearly alike.”

“Do you know this from the books themselves, or from outside testimony?”

“From both.”

“But if there were no outside testimony, would you still be convinced of it?”

“If I had found your collection of Bibles in the desert and had never heard of the work before, and if all the titlepages and dates of printing and the like had become effaced, so that I could get no information in regard to them, I should still certainly know, by comparing the contents of the books, that they were all copied from a common original.”

“That is evident enough upon the surface of things to any sensible man. Now, is any

of them an absolutely exact copy of the common original?"

"Not more than one of them can be, and perhaps not one."

"Then you would say that even this best copy may possibly differ from the original as to the moral and religious instruction it gives?"

"Not at all. All these copies are so nearly alike that they do not differ in a single important item of moral or religious instruction, and that proves that none of them differ in this respect from the common original."

"On reflection, are you sure of that?"

"The more I reflect, the surer I become. And taking in all I have ever learned, along with what we have observed this morning, the matter seems to me beyond doubt."

"You are willing, then, to accept this as scientifically proven?"

"Yes."

"That our ordinary copies of the received

English version of the Bible contain nearly the same matter with the original copy of that version as the translators left it?"

"More than that. For all ordinary purposes of moral and religious teaching, they contain word for word the same."

"But some of these copies, as we have seen, are very corrupt."

"They are not corrupt in such a sense as to make any appreciable difference in the moral and religious teachings of the books."

"Would you, then, be as well satisfied with the poorest of these copies as with the best?"

"I would never be satisfied with a good thing of this kind when I saw a better within my reach. But I should be certain that the two taught precisely the same moral and religious doctrines. If I wanted a pair of scales, and a dealer had a thousand pairs, I should suspect that no pair was absolutely perfect. I should also prefer the pair that was correct to within the hundredth part of

a grain rather than the pair that would weigh correctly only to within five grains. But for selling pounds and ounces of beef or sugar they would all be precisely alike. They would all turn in the same ounce notch. They would all alike measure the commodity more accurately than we could make change in paying for it. So I don't suppose it is possible to tell, without the variation of a letter, what was in the first original King James Bible; while any one of the copies is so nearly like the first that for ordinary purposes the difference must count as nothing. And yet I had rather have the most accurate edition I could get."

Just then, through the window, my eye caught the figure of a youngish man riding somewhat awkwardly on horseback up the road.

My friend's eye followed mine.

"It is the minister," said he, "and he is coming here. But before he arrives let us reach some conclusion. You've been study-

ing here just as you would study to solve a problem in arithmetic. And for any such purpose I must say that your reason runs like clock-work. Now, I want to ask just one question: How far does it seem to you that this same train of reasoning will carry you?"

As he spoke scales fell from my eyes, and I clearly saw what, perhaps, the reader does not yet see—namely, that just such facts as we had been noticing involve a complete scientific proof that any ordinary copy of our received English Bible, for all purposes of moral and religious instruction, corresponds more nearly to what the first authors of the Bible wrote than do our most accurate sealed weights and measures to the standards by which they are tested and sealed.

I was half glad to see my doubts vanishing, but I was chagrined at being thus beaten before I had begun to fight. I admired the tact by which my old friend, instead of arguing his own side of the question, had

led me to argue it for him, but I did not quite like my having been so easily handled by a man of no liberal education. I was also conscious that deeper feelings had been touched in my heart. Faintly the thought came over me, "What if I had the faith and experience of a Christian?" But my pride revolted at the idea of giving it up so.

Meanwhile, my friend bustled around and put his Bibles in their places; and as I felt agitated, and did not wish in that frame of mind to meet the minister, I slipped out, took down a fishingpole from its resting-place in the wood-shed, and strode away to the woods and the troutbrook running through them.

CHAPTER VI.

FISHING.

THE afternoon was not favorable for angling; although no sportsman, I was well enough aware of this fact. But for the wish to run away from myself and from everybody else, I should not have started; and when I say this, I do not mean that I was conscious of any such well-defined states of passion or of emotion as I sometimes find depicted in novels or in books on religious experience. I was simply uneasy.

As I now look back upon it, I find that I must then have been more agitated than I was aware of. In proof of this, I recollect that I never thought of needing any bait until after I reached the brook. At first I undertook to supply myself by cutting into

some chunks of rotten wood for grubs, as I had seen more experienced fishermen do. But I had not the requisite skill, and did not cut in the right places. Then I began to turn over the slabs of drift-wood and the large, flat stones that lay near the brook, in hopes to find worms under them, but not one was to be found. It next occurred to me that I knew of a little old barn in the edge of the woods, not far from where I then was. In a few minutes I had reached the barn. I found there a rusty, broken spade, and by digging for a few moments unearthed all the angle-worms I wanted. I discovered also a small leaky tin cup, which had formerly been used as a drinking-cup by the workmen who filled the barn with hay, but had now been thrown away as useless. I wanted a bait-box, and here was a chance for one. In the corner of the barn was a nail loosened by last winter's frost. I pulled it out with my fingers, laid the cup on a rail, and with a small stone drove the nail through one of

its sides, making a hole large enough for my purpose. It was then no long job to braid a string from the fine tough swale hay, pass the string through the hole I had made and suspend the cup to one of my buttons. Thus equipped, I started again for the brook. On my way I passed some "hornbeam" bushes, and cut a long, slender, smooth twig, with a "crotch" near its larger end, on which to string my fish. It was all useless. I might have known that I would catch no fish that day.

With what skill I had I industriously plied the hook, but not a bite could I get, except from a few "chubs" and "shiners," which I threw back into the stream as fast as I caught them. And at length, overcome by the reaction from the excitement of the early afternoon, and by the influence of the warm sunshine, of the monotonous plash of the water and of the ceaseless murmur of the leaves, I stretched myself on a turfy bit of the bank, and fell asleep.

I presume that I slept soundly for half an hour. But however this may be, I found myself trying to catch fish in dreamland, and as fast as I caught them they would turn to toads and tadpoles. And then I seemed to be engaged in fierce arguments with Farmer Tompkins and his minister, and trying to prove that there were no fish in the world, but only tadpoles and toads. And then I thought that the angle-worms had crawled out of my bait-box and were walking around on four feet and browsing on the bushes. And then I fancied that there was a great shark roosting in the tree above me, and that it suddenly had wings and flew down upon me, but just as it was about to alight on my chest changed into a beaver, slid into the water and swam away, splashing violently with its tail. Next, the bank on which I lay became an island in the midst of a great swamp, and all around the margin of the island was a row of full-throated frogs, all looking at me and sing-

ing at the top of their voices. And then the sounds grew distinct, and I clearly heard an alto boyish voice say, with a strong provincial English accent:

“Ay, lad, but he’s dead.”

“Not a bit he isn’t. A dead man wouldn’t be such a fool as to go a-fishing such an afternoon as this.”

“Ay, talk as ye like, but ye dasn’t go over there and tech him.”

“No more you das’n’t yourself.”

“Oi’ll tell ye what: make a splash on him with the water, and see if he’ll wake or not.”

And as he suited the action to the word I heard the splash of a stick against the water, and the big drops came pattering all around me.

I sprang to my feet in an instant. At this the two boys, naked as statues, dashed away until they came to deep water, and then dived, like the half-amphibious creatures they were.

I at once recollected that there was a "swimming hole" a few yards below, a favorite place for boys, secluded by hills and thick trees, and with a bit of clean gravel shore sloping down into the water. It was clear that the boys had gone into the water at that place, and had amused themselves by swimming up stream until they reached a point from which they had seen me lying on the bank. A thought struck me, and I started at once for the bit of gravel shore. I could run faster than they could swim, and reached it before they did. As I expected, I found their clothes lying there in two little heaps. When they saw me there, they shouted in pretended derision, and veered away into the deep water, where they indulged in such antics as are performed only by country boys in summer in their native creeks.

I quietly sat down and waited, for I knew that they could not go home without their clothes, and could not get the clothes except

by coming within my reach. They saw what I was at, and presently came into the shallow water not from me, and made parley.

“I say, mister,” said the older of the two boys.

“Well, what do you say?”

“Catch many fish this afternoon?”

“What did you spatter me for?”

“’Cos we thought you’d fainted away carryin’ your load of fish, and we wanted to bring you to,” shouted the younger boy.

At this I stepped to a willow bush just by and cut a sprout, long, smooth and pliable. The two youngsters scampered for the deep water again, but presently returned, and the younger resumed the conversation :

“Mister, ain’t you the college chap that’s stoppin’ at Mister Tompkins’?”

“What difference does that make?” said I, flourishing my willow wand.

“’Cause if you be, you ain’t mean enough to trounce us little fellows when we come for

our clothes. And besides, I can beat you divin' for new potatoes."

The little fellow's shrewdness was irresistible, so I replied :

"Have you any potatoes?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"In my pocket, there by you."

"Will you let my clothes alone if I'll let yours alone?"

"Yes."

And so our compact was formed. In three minutes more I was divested of clothing, and was splashing merrily with them in the water. My little friends produced a dozen new potatoes with the skins washed off. These we dropped in the deep, still water at intervals of a few feet. Then we could see them lying in the black mud of the bottom, and glistening like pearls. Our game was to dive and see who should pick up the greatest number of the potatoes before coming again to the surface.

Boys soon win each other's confidence. They trusted me at first because they had seen me with Farmer Tompkins, and then all the more because, though my skin was whiter and my limbs relatively more slender and my chest less round than theirs, I could yet swim and dive nearly as well as they, and I trusted them because they trusted Farmer Tompkins and me. And as we dressed ourselves and started homeward through the woods I made their eyes glisten by telling them about college life and college sports, while they talked mostly about Farmer Tompkins and the kind things he was in the habit of doing.

But, after all, my thoughts were only diverted for the time being. No sooner had I parted with the boys than my reflections turned back into the same channel they had occupied a few hours before. It seemed to me that the course of the afternoon had not been unlike that of my life. In the early part of it I had been well trained, but had

ever since been trying to escape from the good influences God had thrown around me. I had done this aimlessly, and had often been obliged to retrace my steps and to change my course. I had vainly fished in the waters of truth, and the world had then come to seem to me almost as an unreal dream. I had taken absurdities for truths, and had found the firm earth vanishing from beneath my feet, the morasses of error closing around me, and its dim, nightmare-like phantoms coming down upon me.

From this hideous dream I was now awakened. Still, I seemed to myself like a classmate from the prairies who sometimes went with us in our college swimming-bouts. He knew that the water was buoyant, for he saw the rest of us floating in it like corks, but he could never quite bring himself to trust the water. He had muscular power enough, and knowledge enough of the art of swimming, but he did not quite confide in his power and know-

ledge; and so, whenever he tried to swim, he would flounder about, and fill his nostrils and ears with water, and strangle and sink. I seemed to myself to be nearly in his position. I could no longer doubt certain truths which at noon I had doubted. But while I could not doubt, I did not trust. I stood on the brink of the blessed stream, and knew that its waters would bear me, but I could not quite make up my mind to commit myself to the stream and allow the waters to sustain me while I made my way over their surface.

In the midst of thoughts like these I reached the farmhouse, and found it deserted. The farmer, his wife and the minister had gone to the weekly prayer-meeting, and the domestics were keeping tryst with their lovers. But, farmer like, they had left a bountiful supper on the table for me. It was no violation of their rustic etiquette that I partook of the supper and directly made my way to bed.

CHAPTER VII.

HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH BIBLE.

BY morning my perturbed thoughts had taken a somewhat definite shape. I no longer looked upon the claims of Christianity as playthings with which to amuse my fancy or exercise my reason, but as matters of serious import. I felt that I could no longer treat them flippantly, that I must give them serious attention and settle the questions they presented. Perhaps I was farther than ever before from believing the doctrines of the Bible, for at the moment when it became a serious question with me whether I would believe or not my doubts began to assume formidable proportions. They had before been airy and fanciful, but they now seemed all at once to become serious. Yesterday I had

recognized at a glance the complete proof of the integrity of the Scriptures—I had only seen it in the distance, to be sure, but I had seen it clearly—but to-day I could not accept this truth as it yesterday appeared to me. I felt that I must first traverse every foot of ground, and see whether the proof might not possibly be illusive. I really doubted; I did not want to be convinced. I was in a frame to question every witness coolly and skeptically. And yet I felt that one way or the other I *must* settle the question—I must have some ground either for believing or for disbelieving.

Partly from self-respect, but more from lack of moral courage, I undertook to conceal my state of mind. Farmer Tompkins and I soon came, however, to a complete understanding in regard to our investigations, and as we fell into the habit of studying together I was astonished at the scientific rigidity of his method. It was somewhat crude and awkward, but as thorough as the pro-

cess of solving a problem in algebra, or of translating a Latin sentence, or of making a chemical analysis. For several weeks we spent the first half of nearly every afternoon in the library. Mrs. Tompkins was frequently with us. When I became especially interested in any point, I would give up the forenoons to investigating it.

We began by comparing different English versions. Under the article "Version, Authorized," in Smith's Dictionary of the Bible, we found an account of various translations of the Scriptures into English. This account we verified and supplemented by referring to such other works as were at hand.

Adhelm, bishop of Sherborne, translated the Psalms into Anglo-Saxon not far from the close of the seventh century. Cædmon, who died A. D. 680, had already narrated large portions of the history contained in the Bible in Anglo-Saxon verse. The Venerable Bede, just at the close of his life, in 735, finished a translation of the Gospel of John.

One of his biographers gives the following touching account:

“On the last night before his death he continued dictating to his amanuensis, until his increasing weakness attracted the attention of that person, who said to him :

“‘There remains now only one chapter, but it seems difficult for you to speak.’

“‘It is easy,’ said Bede; ‘take your pen, dip it in the ink and write as fast as you can.’

“At length, when it was nearly completed, Wilberch, the amanuensis, recalled his attention, after an interruption, saying, ‘Master, there is now but one sentence wanting;’ upon which Bede bade him write quickly. When Wilberch said, ‘Now it is finished,’ Bede replied: ‘Thou hast said the truth; *consummatum est.*’ He immediately desired to be placed where he had been accustomed to pray. This being done, he exclaimed, ‘Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost,’ and peacefully expired.”

Alfred the Great, in the ninth century, translated portions of the Bible, including some of the Psalms, and also encouraged others to do like work. He especially set forth "in his mother tongue, as the great groundwork of his legislation, the four chapters of Exodus (xx.-xxiii.) that contained the first code of the laws of Israel." And we have quite definite information concerning a dozen other noteworthy attempts at Scripture translation before the time of Wicliffe.

Wicliffe and his contemporaries, from about 1356 to about 1390, made translations into English of substantially the whole Bible. These were widely circulated in manuscript, notwithstanding the work and cost of copying. In spite of the systematic efforts that were made to destroy them, a hundred and fifty manuscripts of this translation are now in existence. Wicliffe intended to make a version in homely language for the use of common people. To this idea of his all our subsequent versions are greatly indebted.

It is probable that all the Anglo-Saxon and English versions up to this time were made from the Latin of the Vulgate, and not from the Greek or Hebrew. In later times some of them have been printed and circulated as relics of antiquity, but, of course, none of them were originally published by printing.

The first printed English Bible was that of William Tyndal. This began to be published in 1525. It was condemned by prelates and learned men. Its author was strangled and his body burned on account of it. Worse than this, it was discredited by the intemperate character of some of its own notes, and by the piratical publication of inaccurate and inferior editions. But in spite of these things, it was reprinted and revised again and again, and has been the real basis of all subsequent English translations.

This was followed at short intervals by the Bibles of Coverdale, of Matthew, of

Taverner, of Cranmer. Then the Geneva or Puritan Bible was published, first in Switzerland during the persecution under Queen Mary, and again, after the accession of Elizabeth, in England. This was followed by the Bishops' Bible, which attempted the revision and correction of all the existing editions. The Roman Catholics published their version of the New Testament at Rheims in 1582, and of the Old at Douay in 1609. The whole number of revised editions of these and other English versions published before 1611 must have been nearly two hundred, though many of these were only of parts of the Bible, and not of the whole.

In 1604, King James of England began to make arrangements for a more perfect English translation of the Scriptures than had hitherto existed. Fifty-four learned men were nominated for this work. Forty-seven of them actually took part in it. They were divided into six companies, three for the Old

Testament, two for the New and one for the Apocrypha. Two companies were to meet at Westminster, two at Cambridge and two at Oxford. The text of the Bishops' Bible was "to be followed, and as little altered as the original will permit." The previous translations were "to be used when they agree better with the text than the Bishops' Bible." Each man of each company was independently to translate or amend every chapter. Then the company were to meet, compare work and agree as to what should stand. After this the work of each company was to be revised by all the other companies. In cases of doubt as to the reading to be adopted letters were to be sent "to any learned in the land for his judgment in such a place." And letters were "to be sent from every bishop to the rest of his clergy, admonishing them of this translation on hand, and to move and charge as many as, being skillful in the tongues, have taken pains in that kind, to send their particular

observations to the company, either at Westminster, Cambridge or Oxford.”

The work of translation began in the spring of 1607, and occupied nearly three years. “At the expiration of that time,” says Bishop Horne, “three copies of the whole Bible, thus translated and revised, were sent to London, one from Oxford, one from Cambridge and a third from Westminster.” A committee of two from each of these three places was appointed to edit the work. A final correction was made by Bilson, bishop of Winchester, and Dr. Miles Smith, afterward bishop of Gloucester. The Authorized English Version was thus at length published in 1611.

Since then their work has been many times revised, but rather for the sake of modernizing the orthography, regulating the punctuation, excluding blunders that had crept in and adding marginal explanations than for that of making verbal improvements in the text. Some dozens of fresh

English translations have also been made. Among those most familiar to American readers are the paraphrases of Doddridge, the translations of Barnes and of Alexander, given in their commentaries on Isaiah, a multitude of other translations of particular books, given by commentators on those books, Noyes' translations of the poetical books, Campbell's version, Sawyer's version and the translations of the American Bible Union. Many of these are of great value, while others are simply the offspring of a vitiated taste. We were particularly amused over Harwood's "Literal Translation" of the New Testament, published in 1768, which aims "at freedom, spirit and elegance," in opposition to what it regards as the excessive plainness of the Authorized Version. Instead of "the damsel is not dead, but sleepeth," this work has "the young lady is not dead;" instead of "a certain man had two sons," "a gentleman of splendid family and opulent fortune had two sons;" instead

of "the scribe said unto him, Well, Master, thou hast said the truth," "the clergyman said, You have given him the only right and proper answer;" instead of "we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed," "we shall not pay the common debt of nature, but by a soft transition," etc.

At the time when Farmer Tompkins and I were looking up these facts the movement now in progress among English and American scholars, looking to such a revision of our English Scriptures as will practically amount to a new received version, had not yet assumed definite shape. But this movement and the general acceptance it has obtained give additional interest to the results toward which we were then reaching.

I say the results toward which *we* were reaching. But for a short time I ceased to care for any other results than the satisfying of a mere antiquarian curiosity. We had determined to be very critical in regard to the facts we accepted. In comparing for

this purpose a dozen of the current encyclopedias, introductions, commentaries and other works, we found many apparent discrepancies of dates and statements. It was slow work to weigh these and agree upon the exact truth in each case. We were several days in canvassing the statements already made in this short chapter; and I confess that I imagined that my rustic preceptor was going very wide of the mark. He had set out to relieve certain very practical doubts of mine regarding the authority of the Scriptures. It seemed to me that he had, instead, introduced me to a hobby of his—namely, the curiosities of the literature of the English Bible. How far my conclusion was correct will appear in the sequel.

CHAPTER VIII.

DIFFERENT ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS.

NONE afternoon Mr. Tompkins took from his case what copies he had of different English versions. There were twenty or more, some old and some new, some complete and others but partial.

“My friend Curr,” he remarked, “used to say, ‘Tompkins, you can’t read a word of Greek or Hebrew. You have to take the say-so of some translator you know nothing about, and each translator accuses the others of lying. Now, which of the rascals are you going to believe, to the disbelief of the rest?’ To prove what he said, he once read to me from the second volume of Sawyer’s translation. Suppose you read the passage. It is near the bottom of the ninth page.”

I read, “No man can understand the com-

mon Bible without commentaries. The reader requires them incessantly, sometimes on account of obscurity, and sometimes on account of errors in the text or translation. He cannot depend on the common Bible either for the true text or the true translation. Every man of sense and information knows that some passages are spurious and some translations erroneous."

"Well," resumed the old man, "here is a Douay Bible, made expressly to save good Roman Catholics from being perverted by the errors of the Protestant versions. And several more of these fellows talk in the same way. If we try to judge them by what they say of each other, we shall find it difficult to get at the truth. But each one of them professes to give an exactly literal translation of the true text of the Old and New Testaments. Let us see how they agree on this point. If a dozen men substantially agree in the statement of every one of a dozen different facts, if the facts are facts

that each might observe for himself and are taken at random, it cannot be by accident. It must be either because they all speak the truth or because they have all agreed to tell the same lies. Now, it is certain that the authors of these twenty translations have not agreed together to tell the same lies, for they hold the most opposite and various religious views, and the most conflicting opinions in regard to the Bible; and several of them have undertaken the work of translation for the express purpose of correcting the errors of previous translators. So far as they agree, therefore, it must be because they have all observed the facts alike. Hence, their agreement may possibly afford as high evidence as we can have of any scientific fact whatever. If I had twenty almanacs, published by twenty rival firms, each criticising the others as inaccurate, but all agreeing to within a second as to when the sun would rise or set to-morrow, I should think that I had far better evidence of the fact than if I

had myself taken the requisite observations and calculated the time, for it would be more likely that I should make a mistake than that the twenty should all have happened upon one and the same blunder. So, in as far as I find these twenty translations agreeing as to what the Greek and Hebrew authors of the Bible say, I take it to be about as good proof as if I understood Greek and Hebrew, and could translate for myself."

"Let us try the experiment," said I, "and see how well they agree."

I opened at random the volume of Sawyer's translation, which I still held in my hand. My friend found the corresponding place in a copy of the common Bible. It happened to be Jeremiah, the twenty-seventh chapter, from the sixteenth to the twenty-second verse. In the two versions it read as follows :

SAWYER'S VERSION.

16. And I spoke also to the priests and all this people, say-

COMMON VERSION.

16. Also I spake to the priests and to all this people, saying,

ing, Thus says Jehovah: Hear not the words of the prophets who prophesy to you, saying, Behold, the vessels of the house of Jehovah shall be brought back from Babylon now shortly, for these prophets prophesy to you a lie.

17. Hear them not; serve the king of Babylon and live. Why should this city become a desolation?

18. But if they are indeed prophets, and if the word of Jehovah is with them, let them make intercession, I pray you, to Jehovah of Hosts, that the vessels which are left in the house of Jehovah, and in the house of the king of Judah and in Jerusalem, may not go to Babylon.

19. For thus says Jehovah of hosts concerning the pillars, and the sea, and the bases, and the rest of the vessels which are left in this city,

20. Which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon took not, when he carried away captive Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah from Jerusalem to Babylon, with all the nobles of Judah and Jerusalem;

21. For thus says Jehovah of hosts, the God of Israel, concerning the vessels left of the house of Jehovah, and of the

Thus saith the Lord; Harken not to the words of your prophets that prophesy unto you, saying, Behold, the vessels of the Lord's house shall now shortly be brought again from Babylon; for they prophesy a lie unto you.

17. Harken not unto them: serve the king of Babylon, and live: wherefore should this city be laid waste?

18. But if they be prophets, and if the word of the Lord be with them, let them now make intercession to the Lord of hosts, that the vessels which are left in the house of the Lord, and in the house of the king of Judah, and at Jerusalem, go not to Babylon.

19. For thus saith the Lord of hosts concerning the pillars, and concerning the sea, and concerning the bases, and concerning the residue of the vessels that remain in this city.

20. Which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon took not, when he carried away captive Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah from Jerusalem to Babylon, and all the nobles of Judah and Jerusalem:

21. Yea, thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, concerning the vessels that remain in the house of the Lord, and

house of the king of Judah and of Jerusalem :

22. They shall be carried to Babylon, and there shall they be till the day when I shall visit them, says Jehovah. Then will I bring them up, and restore them to this place."

in the house of the king of Judah and of Jerusalem :

22. They shall be carried to Babylon, and there shall they be until the day that I visit them, saith the Lord ; then will I bring them up, and restore them to this place.

We noticed, as any one may easily notice, that, so far as the essential meaning is concerned, there is not an iota of difference between these two translations. We then extended the comparison to all the different translations of this passage of which we had copies before us. Then we selected other passages at random, and examined them in the same way. After that my friend told me that he had once devoted several weeks to similar work, and had noted down the results in the margin of a Bible which he kept for that purpose, and showed me the Bible with his notes in the margin.

There is no need of stating the results which we reached. No person could help reaching the same results if he once entered upon the same processes. We could not

doubt that the translations were all alike derived from certain Greek and Hebrew originals, for it was impossible to discredit the concurrent testimony of so many witnesses, especially when they were so eager to contradict each other wherever they could. We found that the various translations displayed many differences, but yet that in nearly all statements of any importance they substantially agreed. This proved to us that they all come from the same originals, and that, so far as they agree, they are all alike correct. In many passages where they differed we were able, by comparing each translation with itself and with the others, to decide which has the erroneous and which the true reading. From similar comparisons and from other internal marks we soon felt indubitably assured that some of the translations, including the received version, possess very superior merit. The agreement of these superior versions we found so nearly complete that, even had there been no other

proof of the same thing, we should still have found it impossible to doubt the substantially perfect accuracy of each.

If any one disputes our conclusion, I challenge him to the experiment. Let him collect copies of any dozen different translations and compare them as we did. He will then be sure, even in spite of himself, that so far as it is possible for any one properly to say that he reads in his own tongue the very words of an author who wrote in some other tongue, so far we have, in any of our best versions, the very words of the Greek and Hebrew Scriptures.

But the farmer's researches did not terminate here. I had noticed in his bookcase several of the most recent editions of the Greek New Testament, two or three Hebrew Bibles, a copy of the Septuagint Greek translation of the Old Testament, and several Bibles and Testaments in Latin, French, German and other languages. I had also noticed, to my surprise, that all these vol-

umes had a great many marked passages. I knew that Tompkins could not read any of these languages, and I was much puzzled as to what use he could possibly make of such books. So I one day asked him.

He replied by the question :

“Suppose you already had proof enough to satisfy you of some scientific fact, and yet knew of another independent body of proof that was easily within your reach; what would you do?”

“I would examine the new body of proof, as a matter of course.”

“But would not that imply that you were dissatisfied with the proof you had already examined?”

“By no means. It would rather show that there is a peculiar satisfaction in approaching any truth from different directions.”

“That is exactly the use I make of these volumes. We have been taking evidence for the past few days as to whether our best

English translations accurately give us the teachings of the Hebrew and Greek Testaments. To my mind, the evidence already amounts to a proof that cannot reasonably be doubted. But here is a vast mass of new evidence on the same subject. I do not need it, but it is very satisfactory to look at it and see how fully it confirms the results already reached."

"But you don't mean to say that you have read all these books in seven or eight different languages?"

"No; but I have made an original investigation into their contents."

"An *original* investigation without reading them? How?"

He arose, walked to a shelf in another part of the room and took down two volumes. One was bound in muslin, the other was bound in half-library binding, was nearly a fourth shorter than the first, and correspondingly narrower and thinner. He held them up and asked me:

“What do you say as to these two being copies of the same volume?”

“They don’t look like it.”

He placed one with its back on the table, and let it fall open. I looked and read as follows :

216 PERSUASION. [PART II.

such a man, when contemplating, for instance, the doctrines and the promises of the Christian religion,

He then opened the other at page 216, and placed it before me. It read just like the first :

216 PERSUASION. [PART II.

such a man, when contemplating, for instance, the doctrines and the promises of the Christian religion,

“The two volumes are alike,” said I, “but they are different in appearance. The smaller one probably had its margin cut down when it was rebound. But at all events, the two are alike.”

“But you have not read the whole of

either, much less of both. How can you tell that they are alike?"

"The coincidences at the place where we opened are too marked to admit of a doubt. I might try a dozen similar experiments, and they would only serve to make a certainty technically more certain."

If my reader doubts that my conclusion was legitimate, let him turn to page 216 of the larger edition of Whateley's Rhetoric, published by Sheldon & Company in 1863, and see whether *he* can doubt as to what the two volumes were which I had lying before me.

The coincidences of a single passage in each may therefore be sufficient to establish the identity of the contents of two books. If there are differences as well as coincidences, it might be necessary to compare many passages; but if the object were merely to show that the matter was substantially the same, nothing less than very marked and suspicious differences could ren-

der it necessary for this purpose to read the whole of both works.

This point being settled, Tompkins handed me a Greek copy of the New Testament and another of the Septuagint. He asked me to select at random three passages one of which should be a passage already marked. Of these I was to write out a translation. I was afterward to look at the same passages in all the remaining Greek, Latin, German and French copies, and note all the differences I found. He would also have added the Hebrew copies but that I did not read Hebrew.

I need not weary my readers with further details. It is sufficient that my friend was in the habit of asking of all his acquaintances who understood different languages just such services as he had asked of me. The marked passages were those which, on this plan, had already been read and commented upon for him. I had no knowledge as to who had read for him the marked passage that I also read for him. I did not know

how my predecessor had translated it, nor what he might have said upon it. Hence Tompkins could easily tell by seeing how far we agreed whether we both knew what we were saying. The list of passages which he had thus "verified from the original" already numbered between thirty and forty. I need not add that the whole tendency of them was to confirm the results previously reached.

CHAPTER IX.

THE FIRST PRINTED BIBLES.

THE value of human testimony may be determined in either or both of two ways. We may test it by the competence and reliability of the witnesses or by the conditions of the testimony itself. The former is the method chiefly used in legal science, the latter that chiefly used in the natural sciences. The latter, where it can be applied, is the quickest and the most decisive; and I cannot but think that Christian apologists would have done better to have insisted on it more than they have. I have been of this opinion ever since my interviews with Farmer Tompkins. His method was strictly that of the natural sciences, and I liked it because of the distinctness and certainty of its results.

It is necessary to call especial attention to this at the point which my narrative has now reached, for I have hitherto given prominence to the methods we employed for reaching certain results, but must henceforth devote less time to the methods and more to the results reached.

We started with the question whether our best English Bibles, and especially those most commonly received and circulated, contain the same moral and religious teachings with the Hebrew and Greek originals whence they were taken, if, indeed, they were taken from Greek and Hebrew originals. To settle this question, we summoned a certain number of editions of the received version, a certain number of copies of many other versions and a certain number of Greek and Hebrew copies, and of copies of translations into other languages.

Had we, with this evidence, adopted the legal method of procedure, we must needs have summoned other external testimony to

determine the character of each of these witnesses, and in every instance of conflict, however unimportant, we must have stopped until we could determine which told the truth or how far each was mistaken. This process, if carried out with any thoroughness, would have been interminable. If not thoroughly carried out, it might answer the purpose of convincing the mind, but not that of satisfying it.

My friend and I did not take this method. We adopted one that was shorter and more satisfactory. It is inconceivable that these witnesses should have happened by mere chance all to tell the same set of lies. Considering who the witnesses were, it was equally absurd to suppose that they had all agreed together for the telling of a certain set of lies. Hence, where we found a substantial agreement among them, we were sure that it must be accounted for by supposing that they all told the truth, since it could not be accounted for by collusion or

by accident. Beyond the truths that were verified in this way we had no occasion to go.

On this plan we did not need to inquire into the character of the witnesses. Though every one of them had been wholly unworthy of confidence, it would not affect the validity of the conclusion. If four notorious liars, none of whom had ever seen or heard of the other three, were locked up, each alone, in four cells, and if in the morning each of the four, without being questioned, should tell you that he last night heard some one, just as the jail clock struck one, cry "Murder!" and then the noise of blows, succeeded by dead silence, in the prison yard, you could no more help believing the statement than if they were four honest men. Your belief rests solely on these two premises: first, your intuitive knowledge that such an agreement could not exist except on condition that the statement was true; and secondly, your observation that the agreement did exist. Wherever testimony can be brought to this test we no

longer receive it as mere testimony, but as a matter of personal knowledge. We believe not on the strength of another's word and judgment, but on the strength of what we ourselves know and observe concerning men's judgments and modes of stating them.

Thus it happened that the conclusions recorded in the previous chapter were to us mere matters of our own personal observation and reasoning. We had not taken them at second hand, we had not accepted them on the authority of any one. Every fact was the result of our own independent thinking just as much as are the facts of any rigid devotee of science who takes nothing on trust, and will hold to nothing that he has not first verified by careful experiments; and any person who chooses can try the same experiments that we tried, or others like them. Whoever takes the pains to do this can hardly fail of agreeing with us in the conclusions we reached.

The same is true, although less directly,

of our further investigations. If, instead of being confined to my friend's bookcase, we had been permitted the range of all the great public libraries of Europe, we might, had we lived long enough, have pursued our method strictly to the end. As it was, we were obliged, from the point we had now reached, to rely somewhat more on the testimony of others than we had hitherto done. Yet we accepted no fact on the mere statement of any single author. We had not all the best books on the subject—we had only such works as my friend's library could supply; and it was not the library of a scholar. We sometimes pieced it out, however, by drawing from the shelves of the village minister. So we had Smith's "Dictionary," Horne's "Introduction," and Hug's "Introduction," and Prof. Stowe's "History of the Books of the Bible," and the article on the "Bible" in the edition of the "Encyclopedia Britannica" published in 1858, and a score or two of other encyclopedias and review

articles, and a good many volumes of standard commentaries, Protestant, Romish and rationalistic, in English, Latin and German. The latter were mostly from the minister's library. Now, such works as these are neither rare nor difficult of access. If any reader doubts the facts as they seemed to us, let him examine the statements of as many different authors as he pleases, and make up his own mind. For our own part, we meant to accept nothing except upon such a concurrence of the testimony of different authors as should render a mistake exceedingly improbable.

Before the invention of printing, the Bible of course existed only in manuscript. If the monks of the Middle Ages did little else worthy of credit, they at least multiplied copies of the Scriptures and other ancient works. The number of copies was small compared with the number since printing was invented, yet it was by no means small in itself. Throughout Europe and parts of

Asia and Africa monasteries, universities, churches and synagogues had their choice copies of the sacred writings. Multitudes of devout priests, monks and scholars had each his own private manuscript or collection of manuscripts. Immense numbers of transcripts, both of the Scriptures and of other old writings, were gathered in public libraries in various parts of the world.

The first printed Bibles were of course copies of some of these manuscripts. Among the earliest uses of the printing press was the multiplication of copies of the sacred writings. A psalter in Hebrew was printed by Jews in 1477, probably in Bologna. This was followed, soon after, by the publication of other portions, both at Bologna and Soncino. As early as 1482 the Jewish publishers at Soncino had an entire Hebrew Bible in folio. Nine copies of this are now known, of which one belongs to Exeter College, Oxford. Rabbi Gerson, at Brescia, printed another edition in 1494; Bomberg,

at Venice, printed a folio Hebrew Bible in 1518, edited by a converted Jew, and two editions of smaller size soon after.

The first complete printed Greek New Testament was that of Erasmus, published in February, 1516. Portions of the Greek New Testament had been previously several times published.

The first entire printed Bible in the original languages was the *Complutensian*, published by the editors employed by Cardinal Ximenes, at Alcalá or Complutum, in Spain. The New Testament of this edition is said to have been printed in 1514, but the work was not published, in the sense of being circulated, until 1522.

Bomberg's second Rabbinical Bible was published in 1526. It was edited by Rabbi Jacob ben Chajim. This was followed by many others, printed by different parties and in various places. Of the New Testament, *Colinæus* printed a fresh Greek text in 1543; *Stephanus* printed his first edition

in 1546, and followed it by others. H. Stephens printed the text of *Beza* in 1565. This passed through many editions, of which the third and most important appeared in 1582. In all, more than forty editions and revised reprints of the Hebrew Old Testament, and a considerably larger number in the case of the Greek New Testament, had appeared in Europe before the translating into English of our Authorized Version.

A considerable number of manuscripts had been used in preparing these various editions. *Beza*, however, appears to have been the only editor who had access to Greek manuscripts older than the twelfth century.

Now, these various early printed editions of the Greek and Hebrew Testaments were published at a period when differences of religious opinion led men to wars and persecutions. They were published in several different countries by editors who were in some cases Jews, in some cases Roman

Catholics, in some cases Protestants, and in some cases neither of the three. Among them are many variations of reading. In regard to the character of these we found abundant and reliable testimony. Indeed, most of the variations which are of any importance are reproduced in the critical editions now published, so that the merest tyro can examine for himself. And it is in proof that these variations are infinitely less numerous and less important than the differences between the different English translations of the Bible. They are hardly more important or more numerous than the differences between the different editions of our received version.

Now, the mere fact that in so many and so independent editions, from such a variety of manuscripts, the various readings are relatively so few and so unimportant is by itself sufficient proof that any one of them, or at least any one of the best of them, is substantially perfect as a record of the

teachings of the original authors of the books. If we read any Greek work of Herodotus or Thucydides or Homer as containing for all practical uses the very words of its author in the language in which he wrote, much more may we read the Bible in any of the current editions as containing the very words of its authors.

It is absurd to suppose that such Jews as Rabbi Gerson at Brescia, Rabbi ben Chajim and Daniel Bomberg at Venice, and others throughout Europe, could have formed a combination with such Roman Catholics as the cardinal Ximenes of Spain or Christopher Plantinus of Antwerp for the purpose of imposing upon Europe a forged Old Testament. It is equally absurd to suppose that the Spanish Roman Catholic editors of Ximenes could have combined with the German Reformer Erasmus and the Protestants Stephens and Beza, of England and Switzerland, to impose upon Europe a forged New Testament. Such combinations being

out of the question, it is utterly impossible that their several editions of the Old and New Testaments should at all agree, except upon the supposition that each was faithfully edited from exceedingly accurate copies of the common original. The uncollusive agreement of testimony among so many competent editors and publishers, who had every means of knowing the truth, and whose interests would have led them to have disagreed if they could, merely for the sake of discrediting each other, makes it abundantly certain that we now have these works substantially as their authors left them.

But the proof of this fact does not stop here.

CHAPTER X.

THE BIBLICAL CRITICS.

A GOOD old lady was shocked at the idea of a science of biblical criticism. She thought that it came natural for people to find fault with the Bible. They needed no training in that direction.

I do not think that the old lady was very peculiar in her views. Perhaps there are not a great many people who really suppose that the science of biblical criticism teaches how to find fault with the Bible, yet I am afraid that the number of Christian folks who suppose just this is larger than the number who have any definite or accurate notions in regard to the matter.

Even among those who understand the scope of biblical criticism there is a prevalent impression that its results have been mostly adverse to the claims of the sacred

word. The existence of this impression, although utterly unwarranted, is not surprising. During the progress of every science there are men who make haste to startle the world by placing before it their own hastily-formed theories. Such theories are often the mere guesswork of some isolated investigator, yet they are apt to contain astounding statements which shall provoke both attention and discussion. Thus it happens that the generality of men are more likely to be familiar with the *side-shows* of any new science than with the really important facts of the science—the facts in which all the investigators substantially agree. Hence it is no wonder that the world is better informed as to the rationalism and skepticism of some of the biblical critics—as to their attempts to prove that Jesus was a myth or that Christianity originated in the fourth century, as to their follies and eccentricities in general—than as to the real, useful work they have done.

My friend Tompkins and I did not wait to make up our minds as to which of the critics to whose works we had access were reliable and which were most likely to be mistaken. In the absence of a definite knowledge as to their competency, we assumed that we must regard them all as suspicious witnesses, and that we could rely on none of their statements, except on condition of such agreements between them as could be accounted for neither by collusion nor by accident. We found that we had no occasion for any facts but such as we could verify in this way, and therefore no need for taking sides in any critical controversies.

It is noteworthy that the manuscripts from which were prepared any one of the twenty reprints of the New Testament in Greek next preceding the year 1607 are said to be more numerous, more ancient and more reliable than all those known to exist of any ancient classical work whatever. There was, nevertheless, a conviction among scholars

that the text of these, like that of the early editions of the Greek and Latin classics, and of all other ancient works, although sufficiently complete for ordinary purposes, was not so nearly perfect as it could be made. From the sixteenth century to the present time many of the most learned men in the world have been endeavoring to secure perfect texts both of the classics, of the Bible, and of other books handed down from antiquity. The work of examining, comparing, classifying and describing old manuscripts, of publishing fac-similes of the most important ones, of studying their various readings and determining which are true, has been pushed with wonderful painstaking.

Investigations of this kind long since assumed the dignity of a science—the science of DOCUMENTARY CRITICISM. That branch of it which treats of the text of the Bible is called the science of BIBLICAL CRITICISM. No science whatever has had

ampler materials, none has been in the hands of more numerous, able and enthusiastic men. Their diligence is attested by the fact that within the past two hundred years several hundred editions in Greek and Hebrew of the New Testament or the Old have been published, each containing the results of much careful study in addition to that bestowed upon its predecessors.

The biblical critics are by no means a narrow set of bigotedly orthodox Christians. They are English, French, Spanish, Dutch, Italian, Swiss, German, Danish, Swede, Russian, Oriental; Protestants, Roman Catholics, Greek Catholics, Jews, Rationalists, Deists, Pantheists. They belong to nearly every nationality, to nearly every school in philosophy, to nearly every religious faith. Some of them have approached these subjects from mere curiosity, others from the love of learning, others for the sake of religion, others from the spirit of controversy. Among them are many of the names most

eminent in science. They differ greatly in their opinions as to the dates, authenticity, reliability and divine authority of the Bible. Their diversities are such as utterly to forbid the supposition of their being collusive witnesses. Surely, therefore, we may take for granted the facts in regard to which they substantially agree. No scientific facts whatever are better attested.

During the Middle Ages, and even nearly up to the time when the first printed Bibles were published, Greek and Oriental scholarship, as compared with Latin scholarship, was at a low ebb in Europe. Both the Old Testament and the New were best known in the Latin translation called the Vulgate. Even Erasmus, it is said, in his first edition of the Greek Testament, found his Greek manuscripts incomplete, and was obliged to supply some portions of the Book of Revelation by translating from the Vulgate back into Greek. The first book ever printed was a Vulgate Bible. This translation was

originally made during the fourth century by the Christian Father Jerome. It was partly a revision of previous translations. When the art of printing first came into general use, vast numbers of manuscripts, both of this and of other works, were doubtless allowed to perish, as being no longer of any great value. Nevertheless, many hundreds of written copies of the Vulgate, old and new, are still in existence, although they are less valuable, and for this reason less carefully preserved and less widely known, than the Greek and Hebrew manuscripts.

Old Greek manuscripts are currently divided into two classes. The *uncial* are written in disconnected characters, mostly capitals, and are generally (in round numbers) older than the year of our Lord 900. The *cursive* are written in a sort of running hand, and are commonly of a date from about the year of our Lord 900 to the time of the invention of printing.

Mr. Scrivener says that his catalogue

enumerates 1463 manuscripts of the New Testament, of which 127 are uncial, and therefore mostly older than the year 900. Strictly speaking, only 27 of these contain the entire New Testament. Others are nearly complete. By combining different manuscripts a much larger number of sets of the complete New Testament in uncial characters could be made. A few contain the New Testament along with certain additional books. A large number are of the Gospels only, or of the Gospels, Acts and Epistles, or of single books, or of two or three books only, or of *lectionaries* or selected readings to be used in public worship. Others have been mutilated, so that now only a few fragments remain.

Most of the known manuscripts, though not all, have been submitted to critical examination. Early in the present century Griesbach's New Testament represented a collation of more than 350 manuscripts. More recently 674 were collated for the edi-

tion of Dr. Sholtz. Professor Stowe speaks of 972 entire manuscripts of the different volumes of the Greek Testament, of which 47 are more than one thousand years old. His list, given more in detail, would afford 91 copies of the entire New Testament, of which 3 date back beyond the year 900, and, as it happens, beyond about the year 400; besides these, 109 additional copies, complete except Revelation, of which 5 are older than A. D. 900; still further, 55 copies more, complete except Revelation, the Acts and the Catholic Epistles, one being older than A. D. 900; and 171 extra copies of the Gospels, of which 18 are uncial.

Nearly three hundred years before Christ the celebrated Greek translation of the Old Testament known as the *Septuagint* was made. Through this version, for many centuries, these Scriptures were even more widely circulated than through the Hebrew text itself. With regard to the number of old manuscripts of this version now known to be in

7124

ΕΝΑΡΧΗ Η ΝΟΛΟΓΟΣ ΚΑΙ Ο ΛΟΓΟΣ Η
ΤΙ ΡΟΣ ΤΟΝ ΘΗ ΚΑΙ ΘΣ Η ΝΟΛΟΓΟΣ .
ΟΥ ΤΟΣ Η ΝΕΝΑΡΧΗ ΤΙ ΡΟΣ ΤΟΝ ΘΗ
ΠΑΝΤΑ ΔΙ ΑΥ ΤΟΥ Ε ΓΕ ΝΕ ΤΟ Ι ΚΑΙ Χ
ΡΕ Ι Σ ΑΥ ΤΟΥ Ε ΓΕ ΝΕ ΤΟ ΟΥ Δ Ε Ε Ν
Ο Γ Ε Γ Ο Ν Ε Ν Ε Ν ΑΥ Τ Ω Σ Ω Η Η Ν
ΚΑΙ Η Ζ Ω Η Η Ν Τ Ο Φ Ω Σ Τ Ω Ν Α Ν Ω Ν
ΚΑΙ Τ Ο Φ Ω Σ Ε Ν Τ Η Σ Κ Ο Τ Ι Α Φ Α Ι
Ν Ε Ι ΚΑΙ Η Σ Κ Ο Τ Ι Α ΑΥ Τ Ο Ο Υ Κ Α Τ Ε
Λ Α Β Ε Ν .

existence, we have found the statement that Dr. Holmes had collated 135, of which 10 or more were uncials, several of the latter being as old as the fourth century.

For the sake of giving an individual interest to this description, let me add a brief account of four among the more celebrated of these manuscripts. For convenience in referring to them scholars have numbered and named them.

The *Alexandrian Manuscript*, or *Codex A*, was brought from Alexandria, Egypt, in 1628, and presented to Charles I. of England. It is now in the British Museum. An Arabic inscription upon it declares it to have been written by Thecla, an Egyptian lady, about 325 A. D. This is not in itself decisive, but there is corroborative evidence that the inscription is not far wrong as to its date. It is of parchment, in book form, about thirteen inches by ten, each page having two columns of about fifty lines each, written in uncial Greek characters. It

is now put up in four volumes, three containing the Old Testament and Apocrypha, and the fourth the New Testament and Clement's Epistle to the Corinthians. Prefixed to the Psalms, by way of introduction, is the letter of Athanasius to Marcellinus, and annexed to them is a small collection of Christian hymns. A few leaves are mutilated or lost, among which are those containing the first twenty-four chapters of Matthew.

Codex B, the *Vatican Manuscript*, has been in the Vatican library at Rome since A. D. 1450. It is certainly as old as the fourth century. A few leaves are lost or torn, and some who have studied the matter think that a few more have been replaced by some later hand. It contains the whole Septuagint,* including the Apocrypha, the whole New Testament, and one or two of the Epistles of the apostolical Fathers. The

*The Greek translation of the Old Testament books from the original Hebrew.

ΤΟ ΔΕ ΕΤΙ ΑΠΙΣΤΗΝ
ΤΗΝ ΤΩΝ ΣΑΛΕΥ
ΟΜΕΝΩΝ ΜΕΤΑΘΕ
ΣΙΝ ΩΣ ΠΕΠΟΙΗ
ΜΕΝΩΝ ΙΝΑ ΜΙΝ
ΤΑ ΜΗ ΣΑΛΕΥΟΜΕΝΑ
ΔΙΟΒΑΣΙΛΕΙΑΝ ΑΣΑ
ΛΕΥΓΟΝ ΠΑΡΑΛΛΗ
ΒΛΗΘΗΤΕΣ ΕΧΟΜΕ
ΧΑΡΙΝ ΔΙΗΣΛΑΤΡΕΥ
ΟΜΕΝΕΥΑΡΕΣ ΤΩ
ΤΩ ΘΩ ΜΕΤΑ ΕΥΜΑ
ΒΙΑΣ ΚΑΙ ΔΕ ΟΥΣ ΚΗ
ΓΑΡ Θ΄ ΣΗΜΩΝ ΠΥΡ
ΚΑΤΑΝΑΛΙΣΚΟΝ·

The Sinai Codex.

Page 136.

New Testament of this manuscript is described as now bound in red morocco, as ten and a half inches long, ten inches wide and four inches and a half thick, with three columns to a page.

Codex Alesh, the *Sinaitic Manuscript*, was discovered by the scholar Tischendorf in the convent of St. Catherine, on Mount Sinai. In 1844, while visiting the convent, he accidentally found some beautiful parchment leaves in a basket of rubbish intended for waste paper. He afterward found other leaves of the same volume in the covers of some old books, and finally, February 4, 1859, a monk showed him the remainder, in the form of loose leaves, tied up in a napkin. It contains the Greek Old Testament and Apocrypha, slightly mutilated, and the New Testament, with the Epistles of Barnabas and Clement complete. It cannot have been written at a later date than the fourth century. It is now in the imperial library at St. Petersburg, Russia. Magnifi-

cent fac-similes of it have been published by the Russian government. One of these is in the library of the Auburn theological seminary, at Auburn, New York, and another in that of the general theological seminary in New York city. A third copy sent to the United States has been destroyed by fire.

To mention but one more, *Codex C*, the *Manuscript of Ephrem*, is a *palimpsest*,* and especially interesting on that account. It was originally a manuscript of the Scriptures, a little later in date than those already described. At some more recent period some one, being in want of parchment, took it to pieces, erased the old writing by a chemical wash, and used portions of it for a copy of some of the works of Ephrem the Syrian. Modern chemistry has restored the old writing without erasing the new. A large portion of the Bible, in very pale ink,

* A manuscript the writing of which has been effaced and the parchment used again.

Α ΠΑΛΙΜΠΕΣΤ.
 Δ Ο Τ Ο
 Γ Ε Ω Ρ
 Κ Α Ι Α Π Ε
 Σ Ε Ν Χ Ρ Ε
 Κ Α Ν Ο Υ Σ
 Χ Ρ Ι Σ Τ Ο
 Κ Α Ι Α Π Ε
 Σ Ε Ν Χ Ρ Ε
 Κ Α Ν Ο Υ Σ

A Palimpsest.

can now be read underneath the text of Ephrem, which still remains in black ink.

Quite full accounts of these and other Bible manuscripts, accompanied by a great many very interesting fac-similes of portions of many different manuscripts, are to be found in a large number of common and easily accessible works. Among these are Stowe's "History of the Books of the Bible," pages 57 to 100, Smith's "Dictionary," under the articles "New Testament" and "Vulgate," Horne's "Introduction," vol. i., part i., chapter iii., Dr. Barrows' "Companion to the Bible," and so forth.

Special editions of the most celebrated manuscripts have been published, more or less carefully and accurately, in order to put a close examination of their peculiarities within the reach of all scholars.

CHAPTER XI.

HEBREW MANUSCRIPTS.—EARLY VERSIONS.

IF the old Hebrew Bibles, written before the printing press superseded the pen, those prepared for synagogue use were usually in the form of rolls. These have always been very difficult of access to Christian scholars. Those for general reading are usually in the form of volumes. They are more numerous and complete, though less varied in character, than the Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. Only a few of them are known to date back beyond a thousand years after Christ.

The existing manuscripts either contain the so-called *Masoretic* text or a text differing from it.

As early as the time of our Saviour the Jews had schools of sacred learning. From

the date of the destruction of Jerusalem these schools multiplied, and gave especial attention to the work of preserving their religious documents and traditions, now peculiarly endangered by their dispersion from the Holy City. These schools are commonly spoken of as comprised in two groups, known, for geographical reasons, as the Palestinian and the Babylonian. The Palestinian schools reached their highest celebrity in the days of Rabbi Judah the Holy, say about two hundred and twenty years after Christ. The Babylonian schools were most celebrated several generations later, and continued in existence until they were broken up by Mohammedan persecutions in the tenth century. A hundred years later Jewish learning revived in Europe and Northern Africa, and a succession of rabbinical scholars, equal in erudition to any men who ever lived, has since been maintained until the present time. We who call ourselves Christians have been very unreasonable in our prejudices against

the Jews. They were the one people who maintained all through the Dark Ages in Europe a really high standard of scholarly and literary culture.

The labors of this long succession of careful students mostly centred in the Old Testament, and these labors, however frivolous any portions of them may have been, were exceedingly various and elaborate.

During the interval between the destruction of Solomon's temple and the birth of Christ the spoken language of the Jewish people had become changed to Aramaic, a dialect growing out of the classical Hebrew, like modern French or Italian out of the Latin, but so changed as to be practically a new language, although the languages of the Hebrew family are far less unlike than those of Western Europe. Hence the Scriptures, read in pure Hebrew, came to be only partially intelligible to unlearned Jewish people. It became customary to obviate this difficulty by oral translations, connected with

the public readings of the Scriptures. Soon after the destruction of Jerusalem, when the oral translations, or *Targums*, sanctioned by tradition, were in danger of being lost through the changes introduced into them, they began to be written out in the schools. In some such way as this, at least, the earliest Targums, or so-called Chaldee translations, appear to have been produced. As the centuries passed by other Targums were added, until Chaldee versions or paraphrases of all the Old Testament had been written, and several different versions of the more important parts of it.

It was also held in these Jewish schools that God had revealed, along with the written law, a large body of oral instructions explanatory of the law. In the "Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge" we found the following account, purporting to be from the pen of the great Jewish rabbi Maimonides, who lived in the twelfth century: "God not only delivered the law to

Moses on Mount Sinai, but the explanation of it likewise. When Moses came down from the mount and entered into his tent, Aaron went to visit him, and Moses acquainted Aaron with the laws he had received from God, together with the explanation of them. After this Aaron placed himself on the right hand of Moses, and Eleazar and Ithamar, the sons of Aaron, were admitted, to whom Moses repeated what he had just before told Aaron. These being seated, the one on the right and the other on the left hand of Moses, the seventy elders of Israel who composed the Sanhedrim came in. Moses again declared the same laws to them, with the interpretation of them, as he had done before to Aaron and his sons. Lastly, all who pleased of the common people were invited to enter, and Moses instructed them likewise in the same manner as the rest; so that Aaron heard four times what Moses had been taught by God upon Mount Sinai, Eleazar and Ithamar three times, the

seventy elders twice and the people once. Moses afterward reduced the laws which he had received into writing, but not the explanations of them; these he thought it sufficient to trust to the memories of the above-mentioned persons, who, being perfectly instructed in them, delivered them to their children, and these again to theirs, from age to age."

To these traditions of the scribes our Saviour often refers, and usually with disapproval. After the destruction of Jerusalem it was deemed needful to their preservation to write them down. A final digest of them was completed, in the Palestinian schools, under Rabbi Judah, about the year 220, and has ever since been known as the *Mishna*. During the three following centuries voluminous commentaries called *Gemara* were written on the *Mishna*. These, joined with the *Mishna* itself, are known respectively as the Jerusalem and the Babylonish *Talmuds*.

The period of Jewish literary history

which is chiefly marked by the production of these works is known as the *talmudic* period. That which follows, until the tenth century, is the *masoretic* period. We must keep in mind, however, that these two periods, like most historic periods, overlap one another. Much masoretic work was done far back in the talmudic period, or even earlier.

In most of our English books we do not mark the proper accentuation of words. We also leave undesignated many of the pauses which we actually make in reading. Yet these things are not left indefinite because left unindicated. A comparatively few words excepted, all cultivated people accent the same syllable of a word. Within certain limits, also, they make the same pauses. These matters are fixed by a certain traditional usage handed down from one generation to another. Precisely in the same way, Hebrew books, as formerly written, left undesignated, for the most part, accents, pauses

and vowel sounds, just as is now done in English by some short-hand writers. The proper pronunciation of words and sentences, as to vowels, stress of voice and rhythm, was a matter of oral teaching, and was thus handed down. To traditions of this class the name *Masora* was given.

The same reasons which rendered it desirable to fix the traditions of the Targums and Talmuds by reducing them to writing applied with yet greater force to those of the Masora. Accordingly, the Masoretes devised a most elaborate and complete system of vowel points and other points for denoting even the minutest shades of vowel sounds, accent, pause and rhythm. These they affixed to the consonant text, not according to their own conjectures, but according to what had been handed down as the true pronunciation and reading of the sacred books. Further, they prepared with most extraordinary care copies of these books. They claimed to have an essentially perfect text.

To secure absolutely unvaried transcriptions of it they had recourse to many ingenious tests. The words and letters were all counted. The middle letters of books were indicated. The words beginning with the same letter were enumerated. Other like contrivances were resorted to by which the variation of even a single letter might be detected. A letter of the original, written larger or smaller than the average, was made of a corresponding size in all the copies, and record kept of the fact. When the transcribers found apparent mistakes, they retained them, not venturing to change a letter, but noting down what they supposed to be the true reading.

Thus was produced the celebrated Hebrew masoretic text. With regard to the date of it, we find great differences of opinion. The following facts, however, seem to be agreed upon: The work was substantially completed during the tenth century; it was most flourishing from two to four centuries

earlier; its beginnings certainly date back beyond the writing of the Mishna, and perhaps to a very remote antiquity.

The masoretic pointing is found, of course, in our voweled and accented Hebrew Bibles, whether printed or written. A few manuscripts only display a different vowel system. The various readings and other masoretic notes were originally handed down in separate books. But the substance of them is found in most of the current editions of the Bible, in the shape of foot-notes, appendices and notes written at the end of each book. These notes also contain the various readings that have been discovered since the tenth century within the copies of the masoretic text itself. The number of various readings thus recorded is said to be from eight to twelve hundred, very few of which are of the slightest consequence.

In all this care we evidently have a sufficient guarantee of the integrity of the Hebrew text, unless these learned Jews them-

selves conspired together to corrupt it, and this, in fact, has sometimes been charged upon them. But no person accustomed to weigh evidence would pronounce the charge proved, and it is simply impossible that they should have made any considerable alterations without being detected, for the different Jewish schools were always more or less at war one with another. Besides, in the world-wide dispersion of this people, copies must always have existed among Jews beyond the reach of the Masorettes. The same is yet more strikingly true of copies in the possession of Christians, Mohammedans and others. The Masorettes never could have got possession of all these copies to interpolate or destroy them. But without thus getting possession of all existing copies, detection was inevitable in case they made any considerable changes. Those existing manuscripts, at least, which display a different vowel system, must, apparently, have come from some other than a masoretic source.

Among the fifteen hundred Hebrew Old Testament manuscripts from different parts of the world which have been collated by European scholars, some, at least, must have been copied from copies that were handed down independently of the Masoretes.

If this point is not already sufficiently guarded, it certainly will be by the following statements.

There are known to be in existence seventeen or eighteen transcripts of the *Samaritan Pentateuch*. From these one or more printed editions have been issued. This Pentateuch is the five books of Moses, as preserved by the Samaritans. It is written in the Hebrew language, and in the old Hebrew or Phœnician character, as distinguished from the Chaldee character, in which, for more than two thousand years, Hebrew has been chiefly written. At least one of these transcripts—that in the possession of the little Samaritan colony at *Nablous* (the Neapolis of Josephus, and the Sychar, Sichem, Shechem,

of the Bible)—is of the most venerable antiquity.

In addition to these more prominent channels of transmission, portions of the Bible are independently handed down in the fragments or complete copies of a large number of *translations* made before the introduction of printing.

Of these the Septuagint, the Targums and the Vulgate have already been mentioned. Besides these, there are in existence complete copies of the *Peshito-Syriac* version of both Testaments, made as early as the second century, and fragments of one or more *old Latin* versions of about the same date. There are fragmentary copies of two *Egyptian* versions, made during the second or the third century. A little later than the year 200 the Christian Father Origen used in his celebrated *Hexapla* six different Greek versions of the Old Testament besides the Septuagint—those of Aquila, Theodotion, Symmachus, and of three others whose names are not preserved.

At some early date a translation was made from the Hebrew of the Samaritan Pentateuch into the Samaritan vernacular—the *Samaritan version*.

These old translations show many differences. Some of the differences are of no small importance. But none of them are of such a character as to raise any doubt as to what were the moral or religious teachings of the original Scriptures.

The translation work continued. At no period, apparently, was it entirely laid aside. Persian translations were made in the fourth and again in the eighth century. The early Anglo-Saxon versions have already been mentioned. There are extant either complete copies or fragments of *Ethiopic* and *Gothic* versions, made during the fourth century; of the *Armenian* version of the fifth and the *Georgian* and *Slavonic* versions of the sixth century; and of many others. We found accounts of more than thirty translations of the whole or of parts

of the Bible into nearly twenty different languages, which are known to have been made before the use of printing in Europe. The whole or large portions of most of these are still extant. Probably no century has elapsed since the death of the last prophets of the old dispensation without its fresh translation of the Scriptures.

Much of the Bible has also been independently handed down in *quotations*. The earlier books of the Old Testament are quoted in the later books. Both are quoted in the Apocrypha, in the New Testament, in Josephus, the great Jewish historian, and in Philo, the great Alexandrian Jewish scholar, contemporaries of Christ. Both Testaments are voluminously quoted by hundreds of Jewish, Christian and other writers from the very time of Christ. There is even no inconsiderable amount of citation from them on old monuments and in other forms of inscriptive writing. Were they lost, they could be substantially reproduced from

citations alone. Large portions of them could be reproduced hundreds of times.

As far back, then, as we can trace them without inquiring into their authorship, we find the Scripture documents existing in the various forms of Greek and Hebrew copies, translations in many languages and almost numberless quotations.

Just as with the different editions of our received version, or with our different versions, or with the current printed Greek and Hebrew editions, so is it in the present instance. The differences among the old Hebrew and Greek copies, the versions, the citations, show that no one of them, nor any collation or combination of them, can be known to be, word for word and letter for letter, the same that the authors originally wrote, while yet their substantial agreement shows just as conclusively that they all have a common original, from which most of them do not materially differ.

CHAPTER XII.

STRICT VIEWS AND LOOSE VIEWS.

I'M inclined to think that we must give up our strict theories of inspiration."

This remark was made by "our minister," the awkward rider from whom I had fled the day I went a-fishing. He was a recent graduate from a theological seminary, still unmarried and not yet ordained. He was thin and rather tall, somewhat dull complexioned, with reddish-brown hair and beard. His face when in repose seemed grave, sad and almost stupid. He had, however, more mental and physical vitality than one would at first look for in him. He was a fair base-ball player, could vault higher than any young fellow in the village, and upon occasion sometimes waxed lively, and even droll. He was a close

student, thoroughly honest with himself, but not very ripe in experience or settled in his views. Hence he sometimes carelessly uttered thoughts that could not stand the test of examination. Some of his attempts at household visiting and other like pastoral work were awkward enough. His manners as well as his opinions needed cultivation.

Some of the lively young people with whom I had now become acquainted were disposed to make fun of their pastor's peculiarities of manner. I think that he was aware of his own defects—aware that these were noticed by others—and was keenly sensitive to the ridicule they provoked, but that he was none the less determined to make beginnings and confident of acquiring skill by practice. His sound sense and stubborn good nature always carried him through all difficulties. Even those who smiled at his lack of gracefulness were compelled to love and respect the man. Perhaps he had all the more influence over

them from the fact of his having thus attracted their attention.

He had "dropped in" to have a talk with Farmer Tompkins, and we three sat in the "library" of the latter.

As the minister spoke the words with which this chapter opens, a shade came over the farmer's face, and he replied:

"But that would lower the authority of the Bible, would it not?"

"Not necessarily. Were we to give up all supernatural claims for the Scriptures, and then appeal to them simply on the ground of their literary merits, we should still find them so much above other books that we might call them, in some peculiar sense, the word of God."

"That would give them the same kind of authority with Shakespeare or with any other book that was remarkably true to nature, would it not?" said the farmer.

"The same kind, but almost infinitely higher in degree."

“But is this consistent with what the Bible claims for itself?”

“I am hardly sure. But even if it is inconsistent, we can only infer that the human imperfection of the authors is shown in their claiming a degree of divine authority which they did not possess.”

“That would detract from the value of their testimony.”

“It certainly would, somewhat. Yet even if they were mistaken on these and many other points, their evidence can be proved to be, in the main, worth more than that of any other authors that ever lived. We might say that God put certain truths into their minds, and that they recorded the substance of these, though with many misconceptions and blunders. At all events, our translations of the Bible are the work of uninspired men. Hence we cannot claim for them a perfect divine authority. But these are the only copies which are accessible to the great body of readers; and since we

must confess that they are not strictly inspired, we gain little by claiming a strict authority for their originals. I am therefore inclined to say, not that the books were inspired, but merely that they were written by inspired men. They contain valuable truth—they reveal things that we could never have discovered without them; and this shows them to be in some sense superhuman. But we must carefully discriminate between the truths written and the mistakes of the men who wrote them. I doubt whether we can maintain any theory of inspiration stricter than this. And this theory has at least one advantage—it gives to any good translation precisely the same kind of divine sanction which the originals had.”

I never saw my uncle more troubled than during the delivery of this speech. That his young minister should express such views—express them before me, the half-skeptical nephew, express them in such plausible language that, while he could not accept them,

he yet could not, for the moment, refute them—perplexed the good and true old man beyond measure. For the moment his culture and his good English vanished, leaving nothing of him but the helpless, awkward rustic. He turned to me and said :

“ Youngster, you’re quicker nor me. Jest put thet into yer logic-mill and turn the crank on to it.”

“ Why,” said I, “ if Plutarch tells us that Demades said certain things in an oration, and if I have some other evidence confirming the statement, I certainly ought to accept it, even although Plutarch is sometimes mistaken in his assertions. And as Plutarch does not profess to give the exact words of Demades, a translation of him amounts to the same with the original for informing me what Demades said in that oration. But it would be more satisfactory if a copy of the oration itself had been handed down. And a translation of such a copy, though not equal in authority to the original, would yet be far

better evidence as to what the orator said than any mere report of Plutarch's could possibly be. So a well-attested report or translation of a report of a divine revelation would be worthy of confidence, even though taken by a somewhat inaccurate reporter. But an exact copy of that revelation, or a good translation of an exact copy, would be worthy of far higher confidence."

This analysis was as purely mechanical as any school exercise could be. I was in the position of an inferior player, looking on at a game between two champions, and *happening* to see, although neither of them saw it, what was the correct move to make next. By the time I had finished, Tompkins recovered his self-possession and his good English, and took up the argument :

"I believe you are right in thinking that the claims of the Bible upon our faith and practice would not be materially changed even if we should adopt the theory you have just stated. But as between that and

a stricter theory—suppose each to have the same difficulties, and only the same—which would be the more satisfactory?”

“The stricter theory, decidedly, provided it could be made to apply to a translation as well as to the original. It would have all the advantages which a rigid scientific statement has over a loose and indefinite one.”

“Mr. Luke has just suggested something in regard to the translations. But which class of theories seems to you most in accordance with the claims of the Bible itself?”

“The stricter class, certainly.”

“Then, if we could get rid of the peculiar difficulties that lie against that and not against the looser theories, you would at once prefer the former?”

“It would be unreasonable to do otherwise.”

“Then what are some of those difficulties?”

“In Matthew, the twenty-seventh chapter, the ninth and tenth verses, I read:

“‘Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value; and gave them for the potter’s field, as the Lord appointed me.’ But the quotation here made is not from Jeremiah, but from Zechariah, the eleventh chapter, twelfth and thirteenth verses. There is therefore a mistake.”

“How do you explain the mistake?” asked the farmer.

“As an error of transcription. The original probably read, as some of the copies still read, ‘which was spoken by the prophet,’ and some copyist, imagining that he recollected such a passage in Jeremiah, wrote it down as it now is. Or perhaps he designed no change, but in absence of mind put in the name Jeremiah, which so frequently occurs in similar passages.”

“On your theory, your explanation is satisfactory?”

“Yes.”

“Would it be less so on a strict theory?”

“I have been accustomed to suppose that it would.”

“But it shows no mistake in the original draught of the Gospel?”

“No.”

“Then the original may have been, in the strictest sense, infallible?”

“But so long as our copies contain mistakes, what difference does it make to us whether the originals were infallible or not?”

“Very much difference. If the originals were infallible, their being so is a truth which we ought to know, and which cannot be useless for us to know. Moreover, an accurate copy of an infallible statement of the rule of duty is worth far more as a standard than a copy of a mere general and fallible statement of that rule.”

“But if you begin to acknowledge the existence of mistakes in your copies, does

not that virtually destroy the infallibility of your rule?" asked the young minister, with quickening interest.

"It would if the mistakes were of such a nature and so important as to prove that the copies are materially different from the original. So it would if they were such as to indicate that there are a great body of undetected corruptions in the existing copies. And if our present copies were noticeably either untruthful or immoral, we should conclude either that they were so inaccurate as to have lost the authority that properly belonged to the originals, or else that the originals themselves were fallible. But the existing difficulties, in point of fact, are *not* such as to destroy confidence either in the absolute truthfulness of the originals or in the substantial accuracy of the existing copies. We may admit the existence of here and there a mistaken reading, or here and there a mistranslation, and may thus explain here and there a difficulty, without yielding

up either the strict infallibility of the original documents or the practical infallibility, for ordinary uses, of our ordinary copies.”

I will not undertake further to report this discussion. The summer meeting of our county Bible society occurred soon afterward, and “our minister” delivered the address, a copy of which will constitute the next chapter. It gives evidence that he had got clearer views on the subject of inspiration than those with which he entered upon the discussion given above.

CHAPTER XIII.

A THEORY OF THE BIBLE.

SAID “our minister” at the meeting of which I have spoken :

“Consciously or unconsciously, we all have our peculiar theories of the Bible, and by these interpret the text and explain difficulties. Our century, moreover, abounds in published speculations on this point, many of them complicated and perplexing, some very lax, some tinged with bigotry, either orthodox or heterodox.

“It is therefore an evident advantage to have a clear and correct theory of the Bible, since its opposite, or even its absence, may lead to skepticism, or to the use of falsehood in defending the truth, or may leave one helpless when his religion is attacked.

“Considerations like these have led to the preparing of the present paper, which is a mere outline sketch of a theory of the Bible.

“The theory sketched has its distinctive features, but is, in the main, neither new, original nor peculiar.

“It does not necessarily conflict even with theories that at first seem to be very different. If there is just a bushel of the facts, any bushel basket will serve to carry them, whether it be round, flat or oblong, although a basket of one shape may be much handier than of another. Your speaker does not pretend that his theory is the only one that will carry all the facts in the case. But it more conveniently answers his purpose than any other theory of which he knows.

“For the sake of brevity he will omit proofs, and will attempt no more than to give lucid statements, such that any one who pleases may examine them.

“First. We should distinguish between

the *matters recorded* in the Bible and the *recording* of them.

“To furnish the materials for a record is one thing, and to make the record out of the materials furnished quite another. It is one process to supply facts, thoughts, feelings, and quite a different process to select, arrange and utter them in discourse. Each sacred writer must have had given to him in some way a certain mass of materials. Out of these materials, using either the whole or parts of them, he must have fashioned those portions of the Scriptures which he wrote. Except as the writers both *had things to record* and also *recorded* them, there could have been no records.

“Secondly. The *things recorded*, or, in other words, the *materials* out of which the sacred writers made the Bible, were furnished in part by *natural means*, in part through *special influences* of the Holy Ghost, and in part by *supernatural revelation*.

“Historical facts, doctrinal reasonings,

sketches of feeling and the like the authors might have procured in the ordinary course of nature. The same is true of the contents of passages that have only a poetical exaltation, since mere poetical inspiration, however real, is very different from what is technically called the inspiration of the Holy Ghost.

“Large portions of the materials that remain may be accounted for by that peculiar spiritual illumination which converts in all ages enjoy. The Holy Ghost shines into the minds of those who are sanctified, lighting up the truth, so that they can see it. The loftiest devotional flights of the prophets and apostles imply no divine help that is otherwise supernatural than as conversion and sanctification are.

“But the case is entirely different with predictions, with the revealing of doctrines that are above reason, and with other parallel matters. These imply distinct supernatural interferences, as distinguished both from natural operations and from the usual

workings of the Holy Ghost. In different instances mentioned in the Bible, revelation of this kind was sometimes by visions, sometimes by dreams, sometimes by an audible voice, sometimes by other means, but always by an extraordinary operation of the Spirit, somewhat like, but also somewhat unlike, his ordinary operations in converting and sanctifying, and yet rather analogous to his work in the performing of miracles.

“Thirdly. In *using* their materials the sacred writers were so influenced by the Holy Ghost that *they consciously and voluntarily recorded just the matters which God chose to have them record as Scripture, in just the language which he chose to have them use for the purpose.*

“To this influence of the Holy Ghost over the making of the records, as distinguished from his influence in the revealing of the truth of which they were made, let us restrict the term *Inspiration.*

“Many writers, indeed, do not thus limit

this term, although systematic theologians ordinarily do so. They apply the word inspiration alike to the divine influences that controlled the supplying of the materials and to those that controlled the making of the records out of the materials supplied. Some even regard the distinction between the processes as unimportant. As we wish, however, to use the distinction, we will call the former of the two processes *revelation*, and confine the term *inspiration* to the latter.

“Those who do not adopt this distinction sometimes speak of different degrees of inspiration for different parts of the Bible, as if the historical parts were inspired in a lower degree, the didactic parts in a higher degree, and the predictive parts in a degree still higher. One may hold this view, and yet hold that all parts of the Bible are equally the word of God, the lower degrees of inspiration being adequate to give it this character as well as the highest. But if we

accept the distinction of terms just made, we take a point of view from which this doctrine of degrees is no longer either necessary or tenable; for with these definitions, the differences between the different parts are differences respecting revelation, and not respecting inspiration, and are mere differences of fact, and not of degree. At the same time, our guarantee of the divine authority of the sacred records lies mainly in the processes of inspiration, and not in those of revelation. It lies in the fact that the constructing of the record was inspired, and is wholly irrespective of the sources of its materials. The writers of Scripture did not make a mere 'human record of a divine revelation.' They did not barely jot down notes of God's opinions, and afterward fill up the notes from memory and from guesswork. What they wrote has his sanction, *in the words in which they wrote it.*

"It does not follow that the authors were mere amanuenses, or that their freedom of

will was abridged in writing. You may explain this as you please. All the theologians agree that a human free act may be somehow the carrying out of a divine purpose. This involves nothing more mysterious than is involved in any instance where one man works through another as his agent. That, in the making of the Bible, the most perfect freedom existed, appears from the varieties and the peculiarities of style and matter, as well as from the direct statements of the books themselves, as also from other considerations. Each author followed his own peculiar bent. God simply guarantees the reliability of the record, its perfect reliability, in the words in which it was originally written. He does not warrant that the style is free from flaws, even though its general excellence is such as to show that he must have exercised an influence over its composition. If its writers compiled, or even directly copied, from older records, God guarantees

that they made the right sort of copies of just what he wanted to have copied for Scripture. If they narrate the speeches of the devil to Eve or to Christ, God guarantees, not that what the devil said is true, but that the devil certainly said it. When Paul speaks 'by permission, and not by commandment,' we have the divine warrant, not that Paul's opinion was sound, but that Paul then certainly held that opinion. Even if any inspired author had written several copies of his work, in the same or different languages, and with verbal discrepancies between them, God might conceivably guarantee that any one of them expresses his mind with sufficient accuracy. When the New Testament writers actually cite the Old, he warrants, not that their citations are critically accurate, but that they are truthful and to the purpose. Finally, he does not warrant that no one shall be so foolish as to mistake the meaning of Scripture. And all these statements are

perfectly consistent with the claim that the various Scripture authors were conscious of writing just what God wanted written, in just the language in which he wanted it.

“It is sometimes added to this that on points of merely historical or scientific fact the writers of Scripture may have been left to their own knowledge, and may hence have made mistaken statements. But such an admission would be fatal to the claims of the Scriptures to any peculiar divine character. If they contain a single untruth or a single immoral statement for which their authors can fairly be held responsible, then God did not guarantee them, for he never makes himself a party to falsehood or wrong. If one instance of this kind can be made out, we must descend to some lower ground in asserting the claims of the Bible. Now, even upon such lower ground the Bible could doubtless hold its own. But we need not give up the higher ground. Not a single mistake or immoral teaching can be

charged upon the Bible as it was originally written.

“Of course this claim is not made for translations. Nor is it made, in the strictest sense, for any Greek or Hebrew printed editions of the Scriptures, nor for any known manuscript copy or copies of them. It only applies to the autograph documents, as originally produced by their inspired authors, or by men inspired, as Ezra is said to have been, for the work of collecting and revising Scripture writings. No one pretends that ordinary transcribers or translators were so divinely helped as to restrain them from the possibility of error. But it is claimed that the original documents constitute a divine record, given in just the language in which God saw fit to have it expressed.

“A fourth proposition completes the theory.

“*Existing Greek and Hebrew editions of the Bible, and even literal translations of it, especially the more accurate editions and*

translations, are, for purposes of moral and religious instruction, substantially word for word the same with the original documents.

“There have been enough mistakes made in transcribing and translating, so that we may hereby explain difficulties that would be otherwise insoluble. Yet such mistakes are demonstrably so few and unimportant as not appreciably to affect the accuracy of our Bibles in the form in which we daily read them.

“These are substantially *word for word* the same with their first originals. A faithful copy of a document is designed to be word for word like it. A faithful translation aims to follow the original as nearly word for word as the idiom of a different language will allow. Either, even if slightly imperfect, is far higher evidence as to the contents of the originals than a mere general account of them could possibly be. Our present copies of the Bible are of the nature

of evidence taken down word for word, and not of the nature of a mere general account.

“Yet they are but *substantially* word for word like their originals, not absolutely so. This is proved by the fact that various readings exist.

“They are substantially so for all *ordinary purposes of moral and religious instruction*. For certain other purposes a few of the variations—and only a few—are quite important. For example, we have three or four different readings of the Mosaic chronology, with differences of centuries between them. To history and science this is very important. He who should determine beyond a doubt which is the true Mosaic chronology would perform an exceedingly valuable service. But these variations do not change in the least a single religious or moral precept. Nor do they impeach the veracity of Moses. The question they raise is not whether he told the truth, but what is the truth he told. And they are of such

a character as not to suggest the existence of other and undetected corruptions in the reading. And so it can be proved to be in all instances. Our present copies vary to a certain extent. This proves that some, and perhaps all, fall short of absolute accuracy. Some of the verbal variations are of real importance to the philologist, the critic or the general scholar. But we have the means of being sure that if we had the originals, word for word, letter for letter, point for point, they would teach, without the slightest variation, precisely the same moral and religious doctrines which our present copies teach.”

“Our minister” gave some of these points more in full than I have done. He also closed with a recapitulation and some practical inferences. I have simply copied so much of his discourse as my purpose called for.

CHAPTER XIV.

ATTENDING PRAYER-MEETING.

THE evening after the county Bible society met was that set apart for the weekly church prayer-meeting. As my uncle and aunt were preparing to attend I astonished them by avowing my intention to go with them.

The vacation was now drawing to a close. In the early part of it they had once or twice invited me to the prayer-meeting, but I had excused myself, and had afterward taken care to *happen* not to be in their presence when the regular evening for the meeting came. But somehow their unobtrusive regularity of attendance attracted me more than any amount of urging could possibly have done. I noticed that the prayer-meeting was to them the regular division of the week.

From Sunday they looked forward to the prayer-meeting, and from the prayer-meeting to the following Sunday. They laid plans beforehand to avoid anything that might hinder their attendance. No invitation or business engagement could draw them away from the meeting.

Now, I knew that Farmer Tompkins was not a fool, nor was his wife one either. I knew that their caring so much for the prayer-meeting must indicate that they found something there worth caring for. Something compelled me to think about this. I could not help recollecting a score of similar instances that had previously fallen under my notice. I was convinced that these things could not be accounted for as mere matters of habit or of superstition. As often as the prayer-meeting evening came around I was sure to enter upon such a train of reflection. The more I reflected, the surer I felt that there must here be some reality which I had not yet fathomed.

My studies concerning the Bible had also given me a seriousness to which I had previously been a stranger. Of the futility of such of my skeptical difficulties as lay in the region of documentary criticism I had now become convinced. I no longer doubted that the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments, as we now have them, are substantially what they were when their authors wrote them. I was not yet fully convinced that these books possess that peculiar and exclusive authority which Protestant Christians claim for them, but only that these claims might possibly not be so far out of the way as I had once supposed. I was certain that these claims had, at least, a peculiar importance which rendered them worthy of careful examination.

Just in this state of mind I had been influenced by the statement of the minister, confirmed as it was by the admission of my friend, that we have sufficient reasons for obeying the precepts and accepting the re-

ligion of the Bible, even if we waive its higher claims and look at it merely as appealing to common sense and conscience. This struck me as true. Had I found in Virgil a scheme of personal piety involving the duties of repentance, faith, justice, beneficence, of self-dedication to God and a constant attitude of prayerful acceptance of divine aid—had I found Virgil stating such a scheme as a thing which he knew—then my confidence in his knowledge of human nature and of its needs would have been such as to commend the scheme, merely on his authority, to my careful attention. It would be my duty to consider it. Doing this, I might conceivably find the scheme so confirmed by common sense, by reason, by my own experience and that of others, that I could not doubt its divine authority and obligation, even though all higher historical proof were lacking. And I could not but admit, as indeed most infidels readily admit, that the Bible, on its own merits, as it commends itself

to any casual reader, is far higher authority in such matters than Virgil could possibly be. So I was haunted with a glimmering consciousness that I ought to consider the practical claims of Christianity over my own life, without waiting any longer for the clearing up of its speculative problems.

Now, it was not because I had reached any definite determination of this kind that I proposed that evening to go to the prayer-meeting. I had not. I was simply uneasy, conscious of needing something, I knew not what, to round out my life. I had an indistinct notion that I might find that something in religion, or that I might at least learn something about it by studying religious people when in the attitude of devotion. But I had not made up my mind; I had reached no conclusion. I now see clearly, in all the shifting impulses and unsatisfied cravings of that portion of my life, and in the fitting of outward circumstances to my inner states of mind, the leading of that

holy Comforter who leads men in a way they know not. But I was then blind, and did not see this. I had never known what the light was. I was merely groping for something of whose nature I had no conception.

Thus, partly by reason of my half-formed new convictions, partly influenced by the quiet testimony for Christ which the pious consistency of those two had borne in my presence, partly urged by a vague instinct for escaping the torture of my unsettled state of mind and by curiosity to see what effect such a meeting would have upon me, and partly from a mere good-natured wish to please two people who had been very kind to me, I proposed to accompany them. It was rather the result of impulse than of deliberate design, although I had been so long thinking about it. The moment after I had spoken I was ashamed of myself, and wished I had not been so foolish. But this feeling vanished as soon as I saw how much real pleasure my proposal gave them.

We started together. I could not help noticing that a certain expression of childish eagerness had suddenly come over my old friend, and that an answering look of quiet joy beamed from the face of his wife. I partly understood it at the time, and I now more fully understand it. From the first they had avoided the display of any such obtrusive interest in my personal religious welfare as might possibly be offensive to me.

I had been a little surprised at this silence. I had tried to attribute it to indifference, but could not. I had called up the theory that a display of interest in the religious state of other people was pure fanaticism, and that my friends had too much good sense to be fanatics, but this did not satisfy me. There was a marked difference which I could not explain between the conduct of these people and that of some of my other pious relatives. At the homes of the latter I had been regularly prayed over at

morning and evening worship, and talked to and hinted at in every conceivable manner. I had sometimes been offended at these things, but had come at length to regard them as somewhat ludicrous manifestations of a fanatical conscientiousness to which I must submit with philosophical good nature. But here things were different. The Lord was never informed at the household altar of my dangerous state of mind. There were no indirect allusions made to the wickedness of my course and the propriety of my turning to something better. At my first coming there was occasionally a special petition for my welfare, but in language that expressed no opinion as to my peculiar religious character and condition; and after that my case was simply included in that of the *us* of the family circle. Whatever they had to say to me about the Lord they said simply, frankly and directly. Whatever they had to tell Him about me they whispered in his ear in private.

And, by the way, one pleasant, open talk with a person in regard to his religious state and duties is worth a hundred hints and suggestions. Approaching people *sidewise* may be a sign that you are afraid of them, and thus a token of respect, but it is not appropriate when you come in the name of Him who is Lord of all. Doing, under a sense of compulsion, what you feel that you ought to do, but are afraid and half ashamed to do, is not the best way of making a religious impression. If a Christian is faithful in watching for opportunities and in *making* opportunities, the time will come, sooner or later, when he can deliver, boldly and freely, every message that God has given him for any stricken soul. Let him bide that time, and not impatiently anticipate it by dealing in cowardly, irritating slants and side thrusts in the matter of religion.

Lest these words should be misapprehended, let me here express my warmest gratitude to the relatives of whom I have

spoken for their fidelity to me. I do not think that their course was always the wisest, but it was always far wiser than total neglect would have been. Nor were their prayers and admonitions unfruitful, not even the worst conceived of them. Easily as I had warded them off at the time, yet afterward, when the season of solemn self-questioning was upon me, all these came to my mind as proof that to my friends who had used them religion was a reality and the hope that I would become religious a reality, and as reminders of my own guilt in rejecting any messages of mercy that the heavenly Father had sent.

But I think that the course of my uncle Tompkins and his wife was far wiser, as it certainly was more influential. They had such an air of religious sincerity that I could never seriously infer, from their abstaining from such hints and reminders as those to which I had elsewhere been accustomed, any lack in their care for my soul.

I had not the least doubt that they prayed for me in private, and desired me to be a Christian. But until I saw that eager, excited look come upon my uncle's face, and my aunt's answering smile of contentment, as I started with them toward the church, I had no idea of the depth and strength of their feelings in regard to me.

We walked in silence—I confusedly pondering such reflections as these, and they, I doubt not, in their hearts commending me to the mercies of our divine Redeemer—until we reached the door of the lecture-room.

CHAPTER XV.

A RESOLUTION.

THE farmhouse was quite a distance from the village church. The farmer made it a point to be ten minutes too early rather than one minute too late, hence we were the first persons there that evening. My friends directly seated themselves toward the front of the room, whilst I took a back seat in a corner. They bowed their heads in silent prayer—and I wish that this beautiful custom were more uniformly observed than it is among the various branches of our Protestant Christian Church.

Presently, by twos and threes, several persons arrived. As soon as there were, in all, six or eight of us, some one started a familiar tune. Other tunes followed, and the time was thus filled up until precisely the

moment appointed for the meeting to begin. Then the minister came forward and took his seat.

These people had evidently been training each other in regard to prayer-meetings, for by this time the room was nearly full. Moreover, each new-comer had seated himself as far in front as he could, so that only a few seats, in the back part of the room, remained unoccupied. After the meeting had begun these were mostly filled up by late-comers, who dropped in one by one.

As the minister took his seat the singing ceased, and with it the last vibrations of the tolling bell. He gave a quick glance around the room, and quietly asked a brother to lead in prayer.

I remember all these details, for I was then in that excited condition in which every trifling particular stamps itself indelibly upon the mind.

The prayer offered in response to the request was a simple and brief petition that

God by his Spirit would be present and bless the meeting—bless it to the several classes of persons present, to the church and to the community.

The minister then read a hymn of four verses, the only one that was read, and the only long hymn that was sung, during the evening. After the singing he arose and lifted the Bible from the desk, but presently laid it down again. At this I noticed a slight movement, as of people who had studied the habits of their minister and were now led to expect something unusual.

“I shall always recollect,” said he, slowly and quietly, “the impression made upon my mind when I was a very little child by seeing a man take out of church a dog which had been running around and disturbing the worshipers. The man took him *by the back of the neck* and lifted him from the floor, and the dog yelped and struggled, but was perfectly helpless either to bite the man or to get away from him. Now, we must be

very careful not to let Satan get our prayer-meeting *by the back of the neck*. You all know that I am about to read a short passage of Scripture and remark upon it for five or six minutes. Then we shall sing two verses of some hymn, after which the meeting will be thrown open. Right there comes *the back of the neck* of a prayer-meeting. Just at that point, very often, no one has anything to say. There is a long, awkward pause. Then some one rises to pray, not because he has any petition to offer, but because something must be done to fill up the time. His cold, perfunctory manner gives tone to the parts immediately following. It takes half of the remaining time to get over the chilling effect. The devil has the meeting by the back of the neck, and holds it helpless.

“To avoid this, let several of you see to it that you have each some request or a prayer or an experience to offer *the moment the meeting is thrown open*. It is not enough

that one only do this, for his doing it would then become a stereotyped part of the opening services. Let many do it. Better that half a dozen should spring to their feet at once than that no one should be found to bear witness for the Lord."

He then again lifted the Bible, read the last nine verses of the first chapter of John's Gospel, and remarked as follows :

"Philip said to Nathanael, 'Come and see.' He did not delay for long trains of reasoning. Of course there was a rational solution of Nathanael's doubt. Jesus originated not in Nazareth, but in Bethlehem. Perhaps Philip was familiar with all the facts, and could have made them clear had he chosen to take the time to do so. We do not know how this was. But at all events, he knew of a quicker and easier way. He did not wait to explain all the difficulties, but said, 'Come and see.'

"Now, there is a rational proof of every claim that Christianity makes, and a rational

explanation of every difficulty it raises. In some instances it is best to traverse the whole ground of these proofs and explanations, but in other instances it is better to do as Philip did—waive all reasonings, and simply say to our anxious friends, ‘Come and see.’

“‘Come and see’ what Jesus has done in the lives of Christians and in the fruits of his religion.

“‘Come and see’ what he does in triumphant Christian deaths.

“It adds a wonderful force to our appeal if we can say, ‘Come and see what Jesus has done for me,’ or, in other words, if we can testify out of the depths of a warm, living Christian experience in our own hearts.

“And we can tell them all, ‘Come and see what Jesus is, and what he is willing to do for you.’ Many who are troubled and perplexed make a great mistake in that they make their difficulties an excuse for

neglecting the practical claims of religion. It often happens that the one thing which persons of this kind need is to understand the truth in the light of an experience of their own."

I have given this "talk" almost as much in full as the minister himself gave it. His manner was somewhat halting and embarrassed. He often hesitated for words. Yet it was not painful, for every one had learned to feel sure that in some way he would certainly extricate himself, finish his sentences and express his ideas. His words had no claim to any other eloquence than that of earnestness, and yet every one listened, and evidently felt a deep interest. To my heart, in particular, what he said came home. I doubt whether he knew that I was there. Even if he had known, he could hardly have been aware of the state of mind I was in. But the words fitted me as if they had been expressly designed for that purpose alone.

When the minister sat down, not more than a third of the hour had passed. Two verses were sung, and during that evening, at least, there was no waiting for the evil one to take the meeting by the back of the neck. In short prayers, relations of experience, requests for prayers, thanks for petitions that had been answered, with occasional snatches of song and a few remarks upon the passage that had been read, the time rapidly passed. Perhaps my own state of mind had something to do with it, but it seems to me that I never saw such another prayer-meeting.

Before the close of the hour I felt impelled to rise and say that, to my regret, I had all along looked on religion as a matter of speculation rather than as a practical affair, and that from the moment then passing I had resolved to give myself up to God for the finding out of the truth, whatever it might be, and for doing whatever service God might require of me.

I did not know at the time the full significance of what I was doing. I had no intention further than that of assuming the position of an honest inquirer. My doubting had rendered me very ignorant in regard to even the first principles of the Christian faith. My perplexities on certain points were not fully settled until very long afterward. I had heard of conversion, but had, at the time, no very distinct idea as to what the term meant. I was conscious of a sense of relief when I had spoken the few words I uttered that night. I felt that somehow a great barrier between Christians and me had been broken down. But it was not till many months after this that, looking back upon my life, I became fully aware that from the time of this public committal my purposes and affections were really changed; and I now feel sure that just then, in that act of mine, ignorant as I was, holding erroneous notions on many points of essential gospel truth, intellectually

doubting, even, some of the claims of revelation, Christ accepted my blind dedication of myself, pardoned my sins and by his Holy Spirit converted my soul. As I have already said, I did not then think so. I was too ignorant of the nature of sight to know that I had already begun to see. I regarded myself only as a seeker after truth. I did not even take the position of an anxious sinner. But I now perceive that our Lord had then already bestowed upon me the gift to which I did not then even look forward, except as a dim possibility of the distant future.

CHAPTER XVI.

WHAT AUTHORITY THE BIBLE CLAIMS FOR ITSELF.

HUR bachelor parson was rigidly systematic in his habits. I do not know but he was whimsically so. He boarded with a poor widow in a little house in the village. He rose at six o'clock in summer and at daylight in winter, and devoted half an hour before breakfast to the widow's garden or woodpile. Directly after breakfast he shut himself up for the forenoon in his study. Just before dinner he sauntered down to the post-office and got the daily paper. After dinner he read the paper a while, and then read books for an hour or two, and then dressed himself and went out, on foot or on horseback, to make visits among his people. Returning to tea, he was apt, when there was no meeting or church

social or other special engagement for the evening, to go and "loaf," as he termed it, for an hour in one of the village stores. There he made the acquaintance of many of his parishioners whom he would scarcely have been able to meet elsewhere. There also he studied character and picked up many a hint for a live sermon. On his return he would read aloud to the widow and her boys until bedtime.

Sundays, of course, were exceptional days. So also were Mondays. He was accustomed to say that he needed one day of rest in seven as much as other people; and as Sunday was his day of hard work, he took Monday for the day of rest. Sometimes, if the day was fine, he spent it in the woods or fishing up and down the creek. Or he would devote it to mending the widow's broken fence, setting panes of glass and the like. But on that day he scrupulously kept out of his study, and read nothing but his Bible and the newspaper.

During the few months which had elapsed since he came the people had pretty accurately learned his ways, and rarely disturbed him so as to interfere with his system. It had come to be understood that funerals and weddings must not usually be appointed in the mornings, and that it was useless to invite the minister to tea either Mondays or on prayer-meeting evenings.

It was a part of his system, where cases of interest occurred in the prayer-meeting, to follow them up promptly by personal interviews. In pursuance of this plan, he came to the farmer's to see me. Before this I had avoided him, but on that day his coming gave me pleasure. We soon became acquainted, and it was not long before he was fully informed as to the studies the farmer and I had been pursuing together.

"Yet," remarked I, "I seem but to plunge out of one difficulty into another."

"What is the present difficulty?" he replied.

“Who wrote the books? And how can it be possible to prove that they came from God?”

“How can you possibly doubt who wrote them?”

“Because the claims made by their defenders are conflicting. How can I know whom to believe in regard to the authorship of Hebrews, Job or Revelation?”

“Oh, I see where your trouble lies; and in trying to remove it, let us start from the vantage ground you have already reached. If we can find out what the books claim for themselves, we shall not so much need to puzzle ourselves over what their friends say for them. And inasmuch as you have proved that our present copies are accurate transcripts of the originals, we may fairly go to them to ascertain what these claims are.”

“That is a new idea to me, but it seems to be a fair one.”

“Which claim shall we take first?”

“That in regard to authenticity, for instance.”

We were sitting in the library. As I spoke the minister went to the bookcase and took down a Bible for each. We turned to the beginning of the Second Epistle of the Corinthians, and read, “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, unto the church of God which is at Corinth.” We afterward found twelve other books of the New Testament claiming Paul in precisely the same manner as their author. We also read, near the close of First Corinthians, “The salutation of me Paul, with mine own hand.” Several of the thirteen books just mentioned have similar salutations. The beginning of the tenth chapter of Second Corinthians reads, “Now I Paul myself beseech you.” Like passages are scattered through the thirteen Epistles. And again, in the third chapter of Second Peter, the fifteenth verse, we found, “As our beloved brother Paul also . . .

hath written unto you; As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood," and so forth. In short, we found it distinctly claimed for the thirteen Epistles, and perhaps also for that to the Hebrews, that they are the productions of Paul the apostle.

In like manner, the last chapter of the fourth Gospel, speaking of the apostle John, the beloved disciple, says, "This is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things."

Turning to the Old Testament, we find a book claiming to be "the words of Jeremiah, the son of Hilkiah, of the priests that were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin." Passages of the same import occur many times in the book. Similar claims in regard to authorship are made in the most, if not in all, of the prophetic books.

There are likewise three works respectively claiming to be "the Proverbs of

Solomon, the son of David, king of Israel," "the Words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem," "the Song of Songs, which is Solomon's."

Many of the Psalms also, either by their titles or by something in their subject matter, purport to be by King David.

In the Pentateuch we find expressions like these: "When Moses had made an end of writing the words of *this law* in a book, until they were finished;" "Moses therefore wrote *this song*, the same day." Portions, at least, of the Pentateuch, therefore, claim Moses for their author. Moreover, the other books of both Testaments frequently mention the Pentateuch and refer it to Moses.

We also ascertained the dates of many of the books, as well as the names of their authors. Of course the books that claim the companions of Jesus for their authors claim to have been written within one lifetime from the period of his death. Jeremiah thus dates certain of his prophecies: "In

the days of Josiah, the son of Amon king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign ;” “In the days of Jehoiakim, the son of Josiah king of Judah, unto the carrying away of Jerusalem captive in the fifth month.” The visions of Isaiah declare themselves to have been “in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.” Some of the books whose authorship is not distinctly indicated within the compass of the Bible itself are yet very definitely dated. The Epistle to the Hebrews, for instance, dates itself when it speaks of Timothy as being just set at liberty. The New Testament also uses the phrase “the apostles and prophets” in such a way as to indicate that a prophetic or apostolic sanction was essential to the writing of Scripture, and consequently that Scripture writing would cease with the death of the last of the twelve apostles. In various other modes of expression this view appears to be confirmed.

This seems to fix very definitely one of the limits of the period within which the Scriptures were written. Looking back to ascertain the other, we learned from the dates given in the historical parts of the Bible that the death of Uzziah occurred from 225 to 228 years before that of Cyrus, king of Persia, which is fixed by profane chronology at 529 B. C. Hence Isaiah claims to have flourished in the eighth century before Christ. This was the era of the foundation of Rome; Greek literature and art were yet in their infancy.

The Bible accounts of the Jewish kings fix the twelfth century before our era as the date of the writings of Solomon, and a generation earlier as that of the Psalms of David. By the common understanding of the Bible chronology, Moses was born B. C. 1571. Whatever he wrote, therefore, was produced within 120 years from that date. Expressions in the Book of Job are thought to indicate an origin still earlier.

We found that the books whose authorship is stated distinctly mention and quote most of the others as on an equal footing with themselves, and that all our sixty-six books have been quite uniformly bound up together and regarded as scriptural, while no others have with any uniformity been so regarded.

Of course we could not enter very minutely into details. And in this narrative I omit many of the details which we actually examined. Suffice it to say that we agreed in the following conclusions :

“First. The Bible claims that many portions of it were written at certain specified dates, and that the whole was written during a period of sixteen hundred or more years, closing a little before the year of our Lord 100.

“Secondly. The Bible claims that many of its books were written by the men whose names they bear, and that these and all other writings properly called scriptural

were either written or perfectly sanctioned by a succession of men set apart for the purpose, known as prophets, evangelists and apostles.

“Thirdly. The Bible claims that the most, and probably all, of its sixty-six books are thus properly called scriptural, and does not make a similar claim for any other writings whatever.”

The minister wrote these down with his pencil, and then added something to the list and handed it to me to read :

“Fourthly. The Bible claims literary credibility for all the books that properly belong to it.”

“That is,” said I, “that the historical parts are credible as history, the poetical parts as poetry, the philosophical parts as philosophy, and so forth?”

“Yes,” said the minister.

“Nobody can hesitate, then,” replied I, “about agreeing to ‘fourthly;’” and I resumed the reading :

“Fifthly. The Bible claims to be the record of a true, and therefore a divine, religion.”

“That avoids the question,” explained the minister, “whether the Bible claims to present the *only* true religion—which is a point to be considered by itself—and also the question as to whether it differs in inspiration from any other religious book.”

“Agreed, then, to ‘fifthly,’” said I, and proceeded with the reading:

“Sixthly. The Bible claims to be inspired—that is, that its original autographs contained strictly, and its present copies substantially, just what God chose should be recorded as Scripture, in just the words in which he chose that it should be recorded, yet without abridging the freedom of the authors.

“Seventhly. The Bible therefore claims to be the only infallible rule of faith and conduct.”

“These need proving,” said I.

He replied by taking up his Bible and turning the leaves :

“ You admit, of course, that by its very diversity of style and contents the Bible claims to have been produced by men who wrote in the exercise of their freedom ? ”

“ Certainly ; but notwithstanding yesterday’s most excellent address, does not that contradict the idea of a strict inspiration ? ”

“ Not if the idea of human freedom can be at all reconciled with that of a God or of natural laws. But I will give you my solution of this particular case :

“ Imagine two men, A and B, of equal mental power and of different culture. A desires B to write certain facts, and at the same time conceives in his mind the form of expression which he desires B to use in writing them. B writes the facts. In all probability, he will use very different expressions from those which A had conceived in his mind.

“ Now, imagine that A and B have long

been intimate, and that B learned the facts originally from A. With this variation, put the case again. A desires B to write the facts, and at the same time conceives in his mind the form of expression which he desires B to use. In this case B is consciously just as free as before. He writes the facts in his own language and style, yet he will be likely to use some of the expressions which A had considered proper to be used.

“Vary the case again. Suppose A to be mature, and B comparatively young and of a very susceptible temperament. Suppose A to have been B’s instructor for several years, and to have exercised a great influence in forming his modes of thinking. In *these* circumstances, A desires B to write the facts, and, as before, conceives to himself the expressions which he wishes B to use. In this case B will be just as free as in the two former cases. His language and style will be consciously his own, yet there will very likely be a striking coincidence between the

words he employs and those which A, in his own mind, desires to have him employ. Moreover, B may perceive the coincidence. He may be aware of the result of A's influence over him, and yet be perfectly and consciously free.

“Vary the case once more. Suppose A, instead of being man, to be God. It is surely conceivable that God may do perfectly that which the man A has done approximately. He may exert over B such an influence that B's words shall be exactly the counterpart of those in the divine mind, while, at the same time, B is perfectly free to use his own expressions, to write in his own style, and is also aware of the result of the divine influence.”

“I see,” said I; “but now for the proof.”

He turned to the Acts, and read the words spoken by Peter just before the Pentecost: “This Scripture must needs have been fulfilled, *which the Holy Ghost, by the mouth of David, spake* before concerning Judas.”

He turned again to near the close of the same book, and found Paul's statement: "Well spake the Holy Ghost, by Esaias the prophet, unto our fathers, Saying, Go unto this people and say, Hearing ye shall hear," and so forth. Then he turned back to the first chapter of Luke (verse 67), and read: "Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying"—*this*, among other things (verse 70), "As he"—that is, God—"spake by the mouths of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began."

He next found the words of St. Peter in which he affirms the writings of Paul, and by parity all the apostolic writings, to be on the same footing with the Old Testament Scriptures: "Even as our beloved brother Paul" "hath written unto you; As also in *all* his epistles," "speaking" "things" "which they that are unlearned" "wrest, as they do also *the other Scriptures*, to their own destruction." He also read Paul's mes-

sage to the Corinthians: "If any man think himself to be spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord." And that to the Thessalonians: "We thank God" "that when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth the word of God." And to Timothy: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God." And the words of Peter: "The prophecy came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."

"But none of these passages," said I, "teach verbal inspiration."

"They teach such an inspiration," replied my companion, "as makes God guarantee the record *in the form in which it then came to its readers*. This necessarily includes the language as well as the thought, in so far as both are concerned in the perfect reliability of the Scriptures. To suppose the contrary

would be mockery. Besides, turn to the seventh chapter of the Hebrews.”

I turned and read :

“For this Melchisedek, King of Salem, priest of the most high God,” “first being by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace.”

“The argument would not thus turn,” said the minister, “on the mere etymology of words, unless divine authority were attributed to the words themselves, and not to the mere general drift of the meaning they convey. Besides, turn—”

“Enough,” cried I; “but how about this ‘only’ in ‘seventhly’?”

He looked at his watch, and answered :

“You admit, then, the rest of ‘seventhly’ except that one word ‘only’?”

“To be sure. The rest is a mere corollary from the others. But that ‘only,’ as I understand it, excludes all other religions except that of the Bible.”

“Yes, and also excludes the claim of unassisted reason, or of any pope or Church or council or creed, to the possession of equal authority with the Bible.”

“Does the Bible claim this?”

“It is time I was in the village. I will give you a single passage. Read it, with what parallel passages you can find, and judge for yourself.”

“But when can we study the question whether these claims which the Bible makes for itself can be maintained?”

“I will see you again soon. Meanwhile, excuse my hurry.”

And he handed me the open Bible, hurried out by the side door, mounted his horse and rode away. He afterward told me that he had promised to be at home that afternoon promptly at six, and that, by dint of hard riding, he had actually succeeded in opening the door just while the clock was striking.

Meanwhile, I looked and read :

“If any man preach any other gospel

unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed."

I also studied the context and a long list of parallel passages, and reached the conclusion that the Bible really does claim to be the only infallible rule of faith and conduct.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE TESTIMONY OF EXPERTS.

IHAD an earlier opportunity than I expected of hearing "our minister" argue the question whether the claims of the Bible to religious authority can be vindicated. I had scarcely finished the looking up of the passages mentioned at the close of the last chapter when I was called to tea. After tea, following the custom of country boys, I decided to go down to the village.

The twilight was just beginning to vanish as I came in sight of the principal "store," with the large green lying in front of it. Out on the green a company of boys were playing ball. Nearer the store four men, two on a side, were pitching a game of quoits with horseshoes. Just the other side

of the ball players stood the liberty pole; some very small boys were snipping marbles against it. In the front yards of some of the dwellings that faced on the green were groups of women and girls, chatting and watching the evening sports of the men. Here and there some sprucely-dressed young fellow stood or sat near one of these groups, seeming to prefer their society to that of his own sex. On the steps of the store and on the edges of the public watering-trough lounged a dozen rustics in shirt sleeves, talking and whittling.

As I approached I noticed a movement among these people. The loafers at the horse-trough assumed an attitude of attention. Although it was not yet dark, the four men picked up their horseshoes and sauntered toward the store steps. The boys, one after another, fell away from their ball game, until there were not enough left to play, and then the rest gathered the bats in their hands and followed the crowd. The

women and girls and sprucely-dressed gal-lants, and even the small boys around the liberty pole, seemed to be pointing and looking. One little fellow in particular, with bare feet, ragged hat and white hair sticking through it, had taken his stand in the centre of the black space left by the last Fourth-of-July bonfire, had drawn his arm up as if to shade his eyes, although the sun was no longer shining, and was gazing as intently as if he had been in a circus. His whole attitude was so comic that I did not wonder at a faint peal of laughter that reached me from the distance.

All these signs so unmistakably indicated that something unusual was going on that I hastened forward to see what it might be, and soon reached the store. It was the very beau ideal of a genuine country store, with dry goods on one side, groceries on the other, wall paper on a stand in the middle, hats, caps, shoes and trunks in the rear, and hardware, paints and oils in the back room, with

a show-case on one counter containing silk twist, suspenders, cards of buttons, powder-horns, regulation base-balls, rolls of ribbon, fish-hooks, jack-knives, crochet needles, laces, meerschaums, and an endless variety of other articles, with a post-office in one corner, consisting of a glazed case of boxes, five in a row one way and four in a row the other way, numbered from one to twenty, and of another unpainted and unglazed case back against the wall, with pigeon-holes marked from A to Z.

Leaning against one side of the wide doorway stood a man whom I at once recognized as the Mr. Curr of whom I had heard my uncle speak. After a long absence he had come back to his old haunts again. Many knew him and were glad to see him. But he just now seemed indifferent to the salutations of his old friends. He held in his hand a bit of paper, from which he had just been reading. A glance showed me that it was the sheet on which the minister had

written down the seven conclusions we had reached that afternoon in regard to the claims of the Bible. In his absence of mind the minister had thrust it into his own pocket, instead of leaving it with me, and in his haste he had dropped it on the road, where Curr, coming into the village, had picked it up, and was now reading it to the crowd assembled at our "village store."

My first impulse was angrily to claim the paper, but a second glance revealed to me the form of our minister himself, seated squarely on the empty wood-stove, a few feet only from the excited Curr, and with a droll twinkle in his eye. I concluded to let things take their course.

It is not strange that Curr failed to notice the presence of the minister, for the latter had come to the village during his absence, and there was nothing professional in the presence or attitude of the brown-haired man who sat on the stove.

I was somewhat more surprised, however, to notice that the minister did not know Curr, and had apparently never heard of him, for he had made such a sensation in the neighborhood that I supposed every wide-awake person to be familiar with his story. The minister, however, had not happened to hear of him. They were equally strangers each to the other, and about equally popular in the company into which they had fallen.

Having finished the reading of the paper, Curr launched into a torrent of profane invective. I had seen some tough company in my time, but I had to confess that what this man had told my uncle as to his talent for blasphemy was no empty boast.

Among the notables of our village was a big-bodied, white-faced, idiotic, good-natured fellow who was currently known as "Double X," because he had a notion that he could use no saw-buck but his own, and therefore carried that useful implement with him whenever he went to saw wood. Double

X was ravenously fond of onions, Limburg cheese and similar dainties, and his digestion was not altogether perfect. Just at this moment he happened to be standing between Curr and the minister. The latter reached out his cane with his long arm, and touched Double X. The touch was so contrived that as the white-faced fellow turned to see what was the matter the full volley of his breath fell athwart the mouth and nostrils of Mr. Curr, who fairly gagged and choked as he angrily turned upon the intruder, and said :

“Get your cursed rotten breath out of my way!”

“He has as good a right as you to poison the air with bad breath,” quietly remarked the dull-complexioned man on the stove.

“What do you mean by that?” said Curr, turning to the last speaker.

“That profanity is more offensive to some of us than garlic and Limburg cheese.”

“Puritanical cant,” sneered Curr.

By another poke of his cane the man on

the stove again contrived dextrously to bring a broadside from the wood-sawyer's mouth full into the face of Curr. The latter, who was remarkably sensitive to such things, recoiled and actually strangled.

"Puritanical cant," said the minister, with a droll accent.

A general laugh followed. The good-natured lover of the dainties of the Fatherland saw through the joke so far as to notice that Curr was angry with him and had the worst of it; and his broad, innocent grin of delight brought such a rueful look to Curr's face as caused the crowd to renew their laughter with fresh explosions. The minister pursued his advantage, remarking,

"The remains of our friend's supper smell no worse than your metaphorical brimstone."

By this time Curr had recovered his self-possession. The laugh was against him, as well as the good sense of the crowd. He evidently saw that there was to be a battle

of words, and that if he persisted in being profane he was already beaten. And he did not like to be beaten. Besides, he was not aware that his opponent was a clergyman, and he already felt a degree of respect for a man who could deal blows in such a cool, good-natured way. So every trace of ill temper had vanished as he made the quick retort:

“Good for you, Mister Scalawag, that the brimstone *is* metaphorical, and not real.”

“Perhaps that depends on whether the claims made by the Bible, as you have just read them, can be substantiated.”

“Substantiated! Fiddlesticks! They are mere bigoted nonsense.”

“Not unless all knowledge is bigoted nonsense,” said the man on the stove.

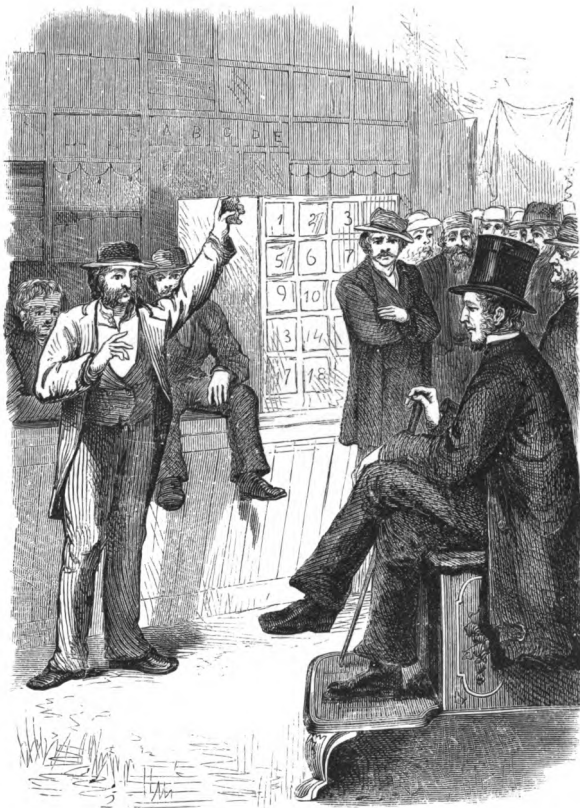
The fight of words had fairly begun, and the two score habitués of our village store pressed forward and instinctively formed a ring around the two champions, looking over each other's shoulders and crowding each

other, in their anxiety to hear, as eagerly as they would have surrounded two fighting dogs, or as the heroic Romans thronged the gladiatorial shows, or our own ancestors the lists of Ashby-de-la-Zouche.

“Look here,” said the naturalist, producing from his pocket a piece of stone containing a curious fossil; “I know that this bit of rock was picked up in a field about half a mile west of this place, on this day of the present year of the so-called Christian era, for I myself picked it up there. *There* is a scientific fact. It is something that a man knows. But you don’t know in any such way that your Bible is what it claims to be. Your minister tells you that it is the word of God, and you swallow his statement and reverence your book just as a Feejee Islander reverences his hideous little image.”

“Suppose I should say,” said the man on the stove, “that I don’t believe that this fossil came from the field you speak of?”

“Then I should say,” replied Curr, “that



The Discussion at the Store.

you are just a big enough fool to believe the Bible.”

The crowd took this for a hit, and laughed.

“I agree with you,” was the good-natured reply. “I should be a fool to doubt a fact so attested. I am as sure of the fact on your word as you can possibly be. In just these circumstances I can no more doubt it than if I had seen it with my own eyes. And if it were true that I received the Bible merely on the word of my minister, still *my minister is just as careful an observer in his line of study as you are in yours*, and just as honest as you in his testimony.”

Curr was a little puzzled by the grin that went around the crowd at the words “my minister,” but he instantly replied :

“Bah! all priests are dishonest.”

“Wait a minute, my friend. Calling names is giving up beaten. Suppose I were to say that all lovers of science are dishonest.”

Now, Curr evidently hated a sneak and liked a bold man. Instead, therefore, of being angry at this rebuke, he seemed to enjoy it. His good temper evidently pleased the lookers on. He replied :

“I see. You ain’t as green as you look. I reckoned to make you angry or scare you, and so whip you in that way. But your parson can’t see that the Bible is divine, no more than you yourself can. ’Tain’t a thing to be seen. ’Tain’t of that kind. He just tells over what he has read in some of his superstitious, musty old books.”

“Do you believe that the earth is round?”

“Yes, of course I do.”

“Have you ever seen it from a point where you could tell that it was round?”

“No.”

“Then somebody else testifies to you that he has seen it?”

“No.”

“It is, then, a matter of mere inference?”

“No, it ain’t. It is mathematically proved.”

“But mathematics cannot create facts. It could never have been mathematically proved without facts being first given to start upon. Where were the facts obtained?”

“By experiments.”

“Did you ever try the experiments or see them tried?”

“No.”

“Have you ever verified the mathematical calculations made from the experiments?”

“No.”

“Then the only clear proof you and I have of the shape of the earth is the testimony of people that somebody has established this truth by mathematical inferences, based again on the testimony of people who say that they have proved certain facts by experiment.”

“Well?”

“Is it, therefore, fanaticism for us to believe that the earth is an oblate spheroid?”

“Well, young chap, you take the thing by the horns. Of course it just isn't possi-

ble to doubt the roundness of the earth, even if a fellow hasn't verified it for himself. It isn't possible that exactly such testimony should be mistaken. But that don't make a rule for other cases."

"Certainly it does not. But the case of the Bible is exactly a parallel one. I observe that nearly all the men who have examined the subject and are in earnest substantially agree with my minister in the conclusions he has reached as to the character of the Bible. And if I had no better reasons to give, it is just as rational for me to accept the divinity of the Bible on this testimony as to accept any fact of science on similar testimony. Nine-tenths of all the scientific facts which you believe come to you on the evidence of the testimony of other people, and not on that of your own observation. Very few of them have a tenth part of the testimony in their favor which the Bible has, or claim to be established by any different kinds of proof from some of those which it claims."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE WITNESS OF EXPERIENCE.

BUT you pretend," continued Mr. Curr, "that religion is more important than science, and I'm sure it makes some mighty sing'lar claims. It won't do to take such a matter on trust, as you do common facts. 'Full proof or nothing' tells the story in such cases."

"It would be difficult for you to show that a religious truth needs any higher proof than a scientific truth in order that it may command assent. Besides, such proof as we have mentioned of the roundness of the earth or of the divinity of the Bible *is* full proof. There is a higher kind of proof that is more satisfying, but this abundantly establishes the fact. However, I *have* the

higher type of evidence in regard to the Bible. I have *observed* that it is in every point just what it claims to be. I do not take it on the mere testimony of others, although I know óf ten times as much testimony as is necessary to make out the case, but also on what I have perceived with my own senses. I know what the word of God has done in my own soul. I know what it has done for others. I have noticed hundreds of facts of this kind, and I just as much know from these direct observations that the Bible is true and divine as you know that your fossil came from a certain place or belongs to a certain class."

"Ain't that putting it rather strong? How did you observe God giving the Bible? Did you see him? Did you touch him or hear him? Or maybe, seeing it's a *brimstony* kind of book, maybe you smelt him;" and Curr brought his hand expressively to his nose and looked around; upon which the crowd laughed.

“There are other methods of observation than by the five senses,” quietly remarked the minister.

“Yes; I reckon you’ll have to have one or two senses more than other folks—a spiritual sense, for example—before you’ll be observing the divine character of the Bible.”

“You recollect finding that fossil that you showed me just now?”

“Yes; what of it?”

“You know by the sense of sight that you found it. But how do you know that you *recollect* finding it? Is that a thing that you can see or touch or smell or hear or taste?”

“No.”

“And yet you know it by direct observation?”

“Yes.”

“You just as much observe that you recollect finding the stone as you observe the stone itself?”

“Certainly.”

“And you and I both observe that you hate the Bible and its religion?”

“Ay, ay, you’re right there.”

“And we both observe that I don’t hate them?”

“That’s sure enough.”

“And we both observe that you are enthusiastically attached to the study of the natural sciences?”

“No doubt of that.”

“I presume that you find that the study strengthens your mind and gives you pleasure, and makes you in many respects a better man?”

“Yes. But what are you going to do with all these miscellaneous observations, I’d like to know?”

“I’m going to make you admit that these facts called memory and love and hatred and enthusiasm and personal culture and enjoyment, and the whole class of like facts, are facts which we know by observation just as really as if we knew them by the senses,

and which we can no more doubt than we can doubt the testimony of our senses.”

“Well, I reckon you’ve hit the truth, though I hain’t been accustomed to see it in that light. But you don’t pretend that in any such way you have observed the Almighty raining down fire and smoke and sulphur and commandments written on gravestones from Mount Calvary?”

“I observe that you haven’t read the Bible very carefully.”

“No; I’ve no time to waste in that way.”

“You would think better of it if you had studied it more. But the Bible is essentially a religious book. It may be regarded as all centring in a few simple facts every one of which may be made an object of personal experience and observation. The Bible affirms that you, and I, and all men are depraved, and you are too sensible not to know that it tells the truth when it affirms this. You are sure from observation that it tells the truth. It also declares that in

order to live our best we need help from a source higher than ourselves; and if you have thought of this declaration enough to understand it, I defy you to doubt it. It also explains how we may avail ourselves of the divine help we need, and may thus conquer evil and live for good. Millions of us have tried the experiment, and have directly observed that its words are true."

"Oh, then it comes to this—that you prove your Bible true by claiming to be the elect, and to be better than other folks?"

"No. My Bible teaches me not to judge others or offensively claim to be holier than they. But I do know that I myself am a better man than I was before I followed the teachings of the Bible. I know that it has done more to make me wise and good and happy than all the studies and all the enterprises I ever pursued. And I am just as competent to testify to these results as you are to testify to the happy influences that your scientific studies have had over you;

and there are millions of others who bear the same testimony.”

“That may all be very good proof for you and the rest of them millions you speak of. But how is it with us who hain’t observed any such thing? How shall we know that you ain’t hypocrites or laboring under a hallucination? After all, you just want us to take your Bible and your religion on your say-so. We might as well begin by swallowing the whole pill on the say-so of your priests as swallow it in parts on the say-so of private Christians.”

“We have already discussed that. The testimony of a minister is like that of an expert in any other profession. The results that clergymen have reached in theology are based upon as careful studies and are as worthy of confidence as those which medical men have reached in medicine or as those which physicists have reached in the natural sciences. It is as rational to accept the theology of Isaac Newton on his authority as to

accept his natural philosophy on the same authority. Experts in all professions often contradict each other. They sometimes quarrel disgracefully. This shows that none of them are infallible, but it does not show that none of them are worthy of reliance. In thousands of instances the very best way to settle points of science, art, life or religious doctrine is simply to trust the conclusions of some reputable, competent person who has thoroughly investigated the matter. But what we are now considering is not the testimony of any one as to *conclusions* he has reached, but testimony in regard to *facts* that we have noticed. Some conclusions you and I would take on trust, and some we would not accept until we had verified them point by point. But we would accept a statement as to what he had seen, from many a man whom we would not trust to draw conclusions for us. You may disbelieve my theories of religion, but, strangers as we are, I do not believe that you have for an

instant doubted, or can possibly doubt, the statement I made to you a few minutes since in regard to my personal religious experience."

"Well, I hain't no doubt of it. And I don't care if I help you a bit right there. Twelve years ago I was collecting debts in Iowa. Several robberies had just then occurred in that section. I had a large sum of money about me, and had grown suspicious. One night I had to stop with a stranger, ten miles away from any other dwelling. It was a convenient spot for murder. Nobody would ever have inquired for a lost traveler there. I took it into my head that things looked queer, and was just contriving how I might steal out without being noticed and put my revolver to rights, when the man took a big, worn Bible from a box in the corner, read a chapter, and knelt with his whole family and offered prayer. It was evidently a habit in that cabin. I hated them for being so superstitious, but that

night I didn't take the trouble to put my revolver and pocket-book under my pillow. And I've seen some other things of the same stamp in the course of my life. I've noticed that some of the chaps that pretend to be converted have an unmistakable genuine ring, and some haven't. About the great body of them you can't tell whether they have or not. But I've noticed that them that have it beyond a doubt have got a kink into them that always makes them honest and decent. But that only proves that there's a good deal in a man's making up his mind to do right, even if he is superstitious about it. It may prove, too, that the churches get their pick of the folks, and that the picked set are better than the rest. It don't prove that the Bible is the word of God."

"But you know very well that the benefits of the churches are offered to the worst people as well as to the best, and that pious folks are not select except as religious influ-

ences have made them so. That is all the picking there is. The facts which you admit prove, therefore, that the Bible is a good book in the power it has over men. They say that it has this power. If you were familiar with the Bible, you would know merely by reading it that it must have. You declare that you have observed that it actually has in some cases. You know enough of your own character to know that you need just such an influence introduced into it as these genuine converts have experienced. Here is full proof that the Bible is no humbug in this respect, and probably is none in any respect. But—”

“Half-past nine, gentlemen,” shouted the prim, gray little clerk from behind the counter, where he had been writing up the sales of the day, and at that hint we departed.

CHAPTER XIX.

MORE ABOUT EXPERIENCE.

THE next morning Mr. Curr came up to visit his old friend the farmer. It was pleasant to see the two men together, they were so cordial and unrestrained. Yet every little while there would appear a painful consciousness of reserve between them, wholly at variance with the general freedom of their intercourse. The whole soul of Mr. Tompkins was bound up in his religion, and religion was the very thing which his friend most detested. No wonder, then, that it seemed to me a very uncomfortable circumstance when, as we were talking after dinner, the minister called. Greatly to our surprise, he inquired particularly for Mr. Curr.

The latter met him with evident reluctance. As he was accustomed to say, he

abominated ministers. A wide-awake man, he had not allowed so many hours to pass by without finding out the character of his opponent of the preceding evening. He had taken a liking to him during the discussion, and was chagrined to find that he belonged to the clerical profession. Had it not been for his regard to my uncle, I think there would have been an explosion. As it was, Mr. Curr's manner showed a mingling of defiance, disgust and respect. But the minister directly produced a small illustrated volume on the natural history of the Bible, and remarked that he had come to see if he could get some instruction which he very much needed.

“Look here, young man,” replied Mr. Curr; “don't you try to come any of your gum-games over me. You've come here to follow up our talk on religion. Pitch in, then, if you want to, but don't take me for a baby and try any of your transparent fooling.”

The minister laughed a loud, jolly laugh.

“Really,” said he, “I *should* be glad to follow up the talk we began last night. I’m not sure but that I should have come for that. I hoped and expected that you would be willing to continue our conversation. But if that had been my only object, I should not have been ashamed to have said so. I have really got into a tangle over this book on natural history, and need help; I am not well informed on such matters. There is no one around here to whom I can go for assistance. You can probably tell me in a few minutes what it will otherwise take me many hours to discover. As for the subject of religion, I certainly shall not attempt to force it upon you against your will.”

Curr took the volume, gave a contemptuous sniff as he glanced at its title, but subsided into a more quiet manner as he began to read the passage which the minister pointed out to him. The two were soon

bending over it, and talking with great animation. The farmer and I had other engagements, and excused ourselves. When we returned, just before tea-time, our friends were still busy with their investigations. After tea Mr. Curr, as if to make up for his former rudeness, himself introduced the topic of religious evidences:

“Well, dominie, I don’t see how you are going to get your argument of last night round to the point of proving that the Scriptures come from God.”

“In this way. Quite central among the statements of the Bible are those which describe a certain group of religious experiences. Millions of people have tested these experiences and found them to be genuine. Among these millions are so many people of unmistakable good sense, candor and sound judgment, and so many whose experience is independent of that of others, that it would be wholly unreasonable to doubt their testimony. Besides, this religious experience,

if genuine, affects the outward life, and thus becomes a matter of observation to others. Now, much of the professed Christianity of the world appears to be spurious. Many people suppose that the majority of those who claim to be Christians are hypocrites. Imagine it to be so, if you choose. You can yet scarcely find a sane person, no matter how skeptical, but will testify that he is acquainted with some persons whom he knows by observation to be truly religious, and to be morally improved by their religion. Further, this experience is offered to all. Every one who chooses may test it for himself. One thing, therefore, is abundantly proved. It is a truth the knowledge of which is within the reach of all persons in a Christian land that a Christian religious experience, as centrally described in the Bible, is a reality."

"But the Bible may contain so much of truth as that, and yet be a stupendous humbug, after all."

“But a book so true to vital human experiences is not likely to prove a humbug. The facts adduced show at least that the claims of the book are worthy of careful investigation, and that the book itself deserves attentive perusal. Let one peruse it, then. If he is on the lookout for them, he will find some things that will at first seem to him contrary to good taste, and even to good morals. But he will also find such sound philosophical views, such a peerless collection of moral precepts, such æsthetic excellences, as will convince him that the book is at least worthy of high reverence and regard.”

“But that don't prove it divine in any extraordinary sense. One might accept all that you say, and yet regard the supernatural claims that are mixed in with these philosophical and moral excellences as an imposture, precisely as we believe the case to have been with the old sacred books of the Hindus or the Persians.”

“But any one who carefully reads and appreciates the Bible, even if he has no personal religious experience, will find it quite as easy to accept its supernatural claims as to deny them and then account for their being sandwiched in among its verities just as they are. But he will also have higher evidence directly within his reach. As fast as he perceives the truth of Bible morality it becomes his duty to practice that morality. As soon as he begins to see that the religious experience of the religion of the Bible is a reality it becomes his duty to possess that experience. As he understands these things better and better it becomes his duty to follow out the details of piety and virtue in his whole life. This is true whether the supernatural claims of the Scriptures can be maintained or not. People who put this truth in practice usually end by accepting the fullness of the divine claims of the sacred word. The reason is plain. They find it so wonderfully reliable, in so many differ-

ent directions, that they come to judge of it as we judge of some tried and trusty friend who never makes a mistake, though he may do some things that we cannot understand. With people who have learned to rely on their own powers of observation, this proof is in itself sufficient. With others it leads to the critical examination of other sources of evidence, and so ultimately to conviction."

"But how about the immoralities and other troubles whose existence in the Bible you confess?" said Curr.

"I do not admit their existence," the minister replied, "but only their seeming existence. The Scriptures contain no real discrepancies, no real immoralities."

"Ain't that saying just a little too much?"

"Not at all. In nine cases out of ten the supposed difficulties of a passage disappear the moment you understand the passage."

"I don't know. That might be so as far

as the telling of the truth is concerned. But ain't there some things in your holy book that don't exactly correspond with our modern notions of modesty? I'm not scoffing when I ask this question. I hain't read the Scriptures much myself, but I've heard tell, and it appears to me that I recollect a passage or two myself that I wouldn't like to quote in promiscuous company."

"If you had read the book more, you probably would not ask that question. In nearly all the instances to which you refer men have attributed to the Bible meanings that do not belong to it, but that come from their own impure imaginations. I do not wish to question the sincerity of a person who raises objections of this kind; but if he is sincere, some one ought to go into his house and saw off all the chair legs and table legs, and carry them somewhere and spread a blanket over them, in order to save his modesty from being shocked. He should be shut in his cellar on Mondays, for fear he

might go out of doors and see a shirt flapping on a clothes-line, and faint away.”

Curr laughed, and replied heartily :

“ You are quite right there. But you say ‘nearly all the instances.’ You admit, then, that there are some passages which you wouldn’t recommend to be read aloud at family prayers?”

“ Certainly. Just as I wouldn’t read the chapters of hard names at family prayers, although these chapters have as great historical value as whole galleries of Assyrian and Egyptian antiquities and inscriptions. A complete moral treatise, like a complete treatise on medicine or on statute law, must treat of unchastity and obscenity as well as of other vices. If it did not, it would be lacking in the information we sometimes most need. In a merely literary book any allusion whatever to these topics may indicate a depraved taste, and is objectionable. But a book giving laws for life and forbidding sin cannot fairly be censured for touch-

ing upon such topics, when they come naturally within its scope, unless it so treats them as needlessly to inflame the passions or shock the sensibilities. This the Bible does not. To read such passages publicly or to gloat over them in private is an unpardonable abuse of them. But this does not change the fact that they are in themselves, in their proper use, proper, dignified and instructive. Exception must be made, I think, of half a dozen needless vulgarities in our English version. But that is a fault of the translators, or rather a result of the changed taste of the readers, and not of the book.

“I do not wish you to understand that I find no insoluble difficulties here. On a close examination most objections vanish at once, but some remain. They puzzle me, but do not seem to me sufficient to overthrow the proofs that the Bible, as we have it, is the word of God. In short, people may here take one of three courses.

“First, they may claim the difficulties to

be so great as to prove the Bible untrustworthy. This no one who admits the reality of a Christian religious experience, or even of ordinary truth and morality, can consistently do.

“Secondly, one may regard the Scriptures as partly true and partly false, and may undertake to separate the true from the false. He who tries this finds himself involved in inextricable difficulties. The different parts are so interwoven that it is hardly possible to believe part without believing the whole, or to deny part without discrediting the whole.

“But thirdly, one may accept the entire Bible, in all its claims, and may then explain, either by facts or by hypotheses, the peculiarities that seem to bear against him.

“I cannot but consider this last as the only rational method. To be sure, it takes time, but no more time than the others; and he who has acted on the truths already attained, and in view of them has made his

peace with God, may then safely at his leisure settle minor points and round out the details of his religious philosophy.”

“But isn’t that telling people to come over to your side and afterward settle the question whether they ought to come?”

“By no means. It is simply saying to every person, ‘Act according to your convictions as fast as your convictions are formed.’ -If a man were sick, and convinced that a certain course of treatment would cure him, he ought to adopt the treatment at once, even if there were points in regard to it which he had not fully settled. His experience while the treatment was in progress would assist him concerning such points; while if he did not adopt it, his lack of experience and his failing health would seriously hinder his investigations.”

Thus the two talked, while we sat and listened. Mr. Curr seemed to have grown marvelously gentle and earnest.

CHAPTER XX.

IS ONE TEXT AS GOOD AS A THOUSAND?

FATHER BLINDGOIT was a pillar in the church. His mission was to detect wrongs and attempt to set them right. The period of his life which he remembered with peculiar pleasure was that when he was an officer of the church at Georgeville. He was accustomed to remark that in that church they had committees on discipline out almost every week in the year, and that a member could hardly speak a harsh word about another but the matter was at once inquired into. To be sure, some people believed that this kind of fidelity had made more quarrels than it had settled. But Father Blindgoit held that church officers should perform their duty and leave results with Providence. He was familiar with

processes and admonitions and censures. He was always in his place at meetings, and never failed to notice if the minister departed a hair's breadth from sound doctrine.

Men of this stamp are sometimes hypocritical and censorious. Father Blindgoit was not. He judged himself far more inexorably than he judged others. He was exact in his dealings, took pains to ascertain and pay precisely his just proportion in all benevolent giving, and was not sensitive to personal slights or desirous of official position. He was convinced that everything ought to move like clock-work, and made no allowance for anybody. But he carefully restrained himself from grumbling, except in cases when it seemed to him that grumbling had become his especial duty. He never absented himself from church or from the Lord's Supper on account of the evils he had discerned in his brethren, though he sometimes came to these services with a sad heart and a long face. He was a good and useful

man, but not popular. He was trusted and esteemed, but never begirt by enthusiasm.

One Sunday, Father Blindgoit took Farmer Tompkins and myself in his large carriage to a neighborhood service, held in a schoolhouse some five miles out in the country. I noticed that for some reason he would have preferred to leave me, but my uncle insisted on my going, and I went. I presently discerned the reason of Father Blindgoit's reluctance. He had something on his mind for the edification of Brother Tompkins, and would have preferred to have Brother Tompkins by himself. It seems, however, that he finally decided not to allow my presence to deter him from his duty. He was considerate enough not to open his mind until after the meeting, for both the men were to speak, and it would not do for them to approach that duty with perturbed spirits.

But as soon as we were fairly started on our return Father Blindgoit reined in his

horses to a walk, and after a little hesitation thus broke the silence:

“Don’t you think, Brother Tompkins, that our minister is somewhat careless in his associations?”

“In what respect?” said my uncle.

“I am told that he frequently spends a portion of the evening at one of our village stores, consorting with people who are not all of the most select character.”

“You do not learn that he demeans himself unworthily among them?”

“No; I am even aware that he often derives from them valuable lessons in regard to human life and character, and also that he has there acquired an influence over some poor sinners whom he would not otherwise have reached, by which they appear to have been led to repentance and better lives.”

“If that is the case, his conduct seems to me very much like that of Him who was reviled for associating with publicans and sinners.”

“Undoubtedly, in that aspect of the case. But ‘can one touch pitch, and not be defiled’? It seems to me that our minister has not altogether escaped contamination from the evil company he keeps.”

“Ah!” said Tompkins.

“I have noted, of late, that he has been somewhat free in his utterances in regard to the Bible, the great repository of our faith. I do not know that he has overstepped the ancient landmarks, but he loves to hover near the boundaries, where a single leap might take him astray. And inquiring into the reason of this, I found that he had been somewhat in the company of a blatant infidel named Curr, whom he met at the store, and at first belabored manfully in defence of the truth, but afterward sought and associated with. It is reported, I am sorry to say, that he sought Curr at your home and table. It is also reported that our young friend here is somewhat tainted by the same subtle skepticism.”

I was somewhat startled by my uncle's opinion of me as expressed in his reply :

“I do not think that Mr. Luke is a skeptic, or even an unbeliever.”

“Thank God for that,” said Father Blindgoit, looking so wistfully at me that I could not help feeling more kindly toward him than I had a moment before.

“It is true,” continued my uncle, “that the minister met Curr at my house, and gained such an influence over him as to lead him to talk seriously and candidly on religious affairs—a thing which I don't believe the man has done before in twenty-five years. But what are the symptoms that you see that our minister is falling away from orthodoxy?”

“I never hear him say that the Bible is *absolute* truth. Now, I believe that it is not only absolute truth, but the *only* absolute truth. You may be misled by what men say; you may be mistaken as to the inductions of the sciences; you may even be mistaken

as to the testimony of your senses or of consciousness, or as to the conclusions of mathematics; but the Bible is God's word, and can never lead you astray."

"I suppose that I believe that," replied Tompkins, "in precisely the same sense in which you believe it. But stating it just as you do, a great many people would wholly misunderstand it. The question whether our knowledge derived from the Bible is absolute depends on our definition of that word. I presume that our minister uses it in a sense in which it does not apply to the Bible. Knowledge drawn from the Scriptures is *as certain* as any absolute knowledge can possibly be. It admits no possibility of actual doubt. But according to the distinction that many men make, it is not absolute—that is, it is not *axiomatic*. It is not a matter of direct insight. You are not sure that every one must see it to be true, as you are that every one must see that two and two are four. Knowledge derived from the Bible

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cannot mount higher than our knowledge that the Bible is divinely true. But this latter knowledge comes, not by intuition, but from experience and testimony.”

“But Bible truth is at least more certain than any other truth can be.”

“Bible truth cannot be more than perfectly certain, and some other truths are perfectly certain. I may be mistaken in my understanding of the Bible, as in my understanding of any other truth. God has told no lies in nature any more than in his revealed word. Where the two seem to agree, one may be as true as the other; where they seem to disagree, it must be because we misunderstand one or both. Now, I should never say, as you do, that the Bible is more certain than other truths, because I do not see how anything can be more certain than are some other truths. But I suppose that I say precisely what you *mean* when I say that in matters of faith and morals the teachings of the Bible are more authoritative

than those of nature, since God has given the former for this very purpose, and so given them that they are less likely to be misunderstood than are the latter.”

“But I believe that every word of the Bible is inspired, so that there is no room left for mistakes.”

“You do not believe, however, that every person who ever copied the Scriptures was inspired. There is a possibility that any given word may be an error in transcribing. There is also a possibility that any given word may have been mistranslated.”

“What, Brother Tompkins! you do not mean to say that the word of God is full of mistakes?”

“No. The probabilities are thousands to one in favor of the accuracy of any particular passage, unless we have proof against its accuracy. But there is yet a *possibility* that the *meaning* that I assign to any particular text may not be a real Scripture truth, but a mere human conjecture.”

“But is not one text as good as a thousand to establish any point of belief?”

“It would be if our copies of the Bible were entirely perfect and we could never mistake their meaning. But as it is, if I base an opinion exclusively on some particular text, it is barely possible that that text may be a corrupt reading or a mistranslation. Nor is it impossible that I may have misapprehended it.”

“Then the Bible isn’t infallible at all.”

“Certainly it is. What I have said implies no distrust of any statement of the Scriptures. The only doubt is as to whether any given statement is really a part of the Scriptures, or else as to whether I have correctly understood the statement.”

“But if you’ve got to subtract these two doubts every time, the infallibility that remains don’t amount to much.”

“It would not if the only possible method of searching the Scriptures were that of taking a single text and pinning your faith to

it for weal or for woe. But this is not usually, and ought never to be, our method of drawing conclusions from the Bible. We generally do, and always should, form our opinions by studying the whole scope of a connected passage, or else by gathering together many or all the utterances of the different parts of the Bible on the points under consideration. Whilst it is possible that here and there a sentence in the Bibles we use may have been somewhat incorrectly transmitted, it is substantially impossible that the whole scope of any long connected passage has been changed. It is yet less possible that the whole body of utterances on any given point, in all the various books, should have been changed alike. The views I have stated do not at all detract from the infallibility of the word of God. They only caution us against a false method of studying it."

"You don't mean to say that we've got to study the Bible just as we study nature or

ordinary books in order to find out its meaning?"

"Yes, I do. Why not?"

"Doesn't Paul say, 'Neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned'? I believe that God by his Spirit enables converted persons to understand his word, and don't enable others. To some of his people he gives a high degree of spiritual discernment, and to others a low degree. And this is the reason why all sorts of errorists pretend to prove all sorts of things from the Bible. They are destitute of spiritual sight, and therefore do not see the thing as it is."

"But," said the farmer, "you and I both believe that the Holy Ghost usually works through the ordinary faculties of men, without changing the laws of those faculties. As the Scriptures are sacred, we should treat them more reverently than we treat other books. As they are religious, deep spiritual-mindedness is a great help to appreciating them. There is a fullness of meaning in

them which no one ever understands, except through the help of the Holy Ghost. But this difference respects not the meaning itself of the Scriptures, but the degree in which *we* appreciate their meaning. The meaning itself must be the same to all, sanctified or unsanctified, although some catch it more completely than others. And that meaning is to be ascertained on precisely the same principles with the meaning of anything else.”

“But my idea has always been that in nature God gives us truths which we have to work out for ourselves, and about which we may be mistaken, but in revelation truths that he has worked out for us, and concerning which we cannot be mistaken.”

“And yet, Father Blindgoit, do you not know that men are mistaken about the one as really as about the other? And is it not true that you have had to work out your own Bible beliefs as well as your other beliefs?”

“But if revelation is no clearer or more

certain than nature, what is the use of having any revelation?"

"If it were no clearer or more certain, there would yet be the incalculable advantage of our having two sources of information instead of one only. But in its proper field it is clearer and more certain. Like nature, it is liable to be misunderstood, but not so liable as nature. Besides, it tells us important truths that we should never have learned from nature alone."

"Whoa!" said Father Blindgoit as he reined up at my uncle's gate. We left the carriage, and he drove silently away. I am sure that he afterward had many a tough thinking-spell over the themes that day discussed. The ruts in which his opinions move are worn very deep—I do not know that he has been at all helped out of them; but if he still has fears for the soundness of my uncle and the minister, he keeps them charitably locked up, and tells nobody but the wise heavenly Father.

CHAPTER XXI.

PRIVATE JUDGMENT.

DOES not the exclusiveness of the Christian religion inevitably make it a persecuting religion?"

"How're you going to hitch that on?"

I had thoughtlessly put my question without noticing that the farmer was immersed in some train of agricultural studies. He did not seem vexed, however, at the interruption, although his rustic dialect showed plainly in what channel his thoughts were running.

"Why, if this is the only true religion, every other religion must be false; and how can it tolerate falsehood?"

"By running it through this mill: 'Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth.'"

“But if all people but orthodox church members are going to be damned, are not Roman Catholics right in converting men by the rack and the thumbscrew, or in burning incorrigible heretics to prevent their incurring yet worse degrees of punishment in hell?” I asked.

Just at that moment something of the old skeptical mood had come over me. Tompkins was evidently aroused, but said nothing. I continued, half doubtingly and half inquiringly:

“How shall they believe on him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach except they be sent?” And “There is none other name given under heaven among men, whereby we must be saved.”

“In the last of your two texts,” said the farmer, “the Bible certainly claims that no one can be saved except through the plan it presents. In the other it affirms the great

improbability of any one's being saved on that plan without a somewhat intelligent knowledge of it. But it does not affirm that there is here an utter impossibility. It elsewhere speaks of God's requiring 'according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not.'"

"But faith in Christ," I responded, "is necessary to salvation."

"And Christ said of the Gentile centurion, 'I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel;' and to the Syrophenician woman, 'O woman, great is thy faith.' Peter was inspired to tell Cornelius: 'In every nation, he that feareth God and doeth righteousness is accepted.' By faith the Bible does not mean probable knowledge. It means rather a trusting frame of soul. It seems to me that this peculiar frame of soul would virtually be faith in Christ, even if its possessor had no historical knowledge of Christ whatever. It is inconsistent with wholly culpable ignorance or perversity of views in re-

ligion. But God alone knows how far these things are culpable, or how far they render genuine faith impossible."

"Then what is the use of sending the gospel to the heathen or of standing up for sound doctrine?"

"Because the less light any one has, the less likely he is to make use of what he has."

"Can we be sure of that?"

"It is quite fashionable to doubt or deny it. But unless it be true, there is no advantage in civilization or in education."

"But the instructing of men in the gospel increases their condemnation if they reject the gospel. Is it not, then, a misfortune for them to be instructed?"

"Just the contrary, for instruction increases in a still greater ratio the likelihood that they will accept the gospel."

"But for those, at least, who do not accept, it is a misfortune."

"It is commonly so represented. But even they are rescued from many particular

immoralities. If their guilt is made deeper, they are at least guilty of fewer sins. Nor can we hold back from so plain a duty as that of giving the gospel to the heathen, even if they may reject it, and so increase their guilt."

"Your views differ, do they not, from those of the great body of Protestant Christians?"

"I do not know how far they differ. Most men state their opinions without regard to the fact that every finite truth has its limits, and is true only within those limits. If a man should look at the guilt of rejecting the gospel, and at that alone, he would be apt to deny that it is any advantage to most men to have the gospel. If the same man should look at the results of the lack of the word of God, and at them alone, he would magnify the helplessness of those who have no gospel. But if he looked at both groups of facts, he would be apt to reach conclusions very much like those I have just stated.

And I am disposed to think that the great body of Christians hold nearly these views, though perhaps few have so completely thought them out as to be able to state them."

"But have not the advocates of all religions alike persecuted those who differed with them? And are not fanaticism and bigotry the most cruel things in the universe?"

"No; and it makes me angry to hear intelligent people repeat such assertions, and take them for granted. Fanaticism and bigotry and superstition and false religion are bad enough, but they are not responsible for one tenth of the evil that has been charged upon them. Talk about the fanaticism of Annas and Caiaphas and Herod and Pilate! They were not fanatics. They had no religious convictions whatever. They hated Jesus because his influence stood in the way of their selfish plans. They put him to death in order to make capital out of it. The Roman emperors

and statesmen who persecuted the Christians were not usually superstitious pagan bigots. They were such thorough skeptics that they disbelieved in even the possibility of a genuine religious faith. The constancy of the Christians seemed to them to be the hypocritical contumacy of men who were concealing some deep-laid plot under the cloak of religion. Philip of Spain and his court butchered and assassinated in the Netherlands in the name of religion, but the same men butchered and assassinated in France without any pretence of religion. Fancy the religious zeal that actuated such men as Henry the Eighth or Laud or Jeffreys or Charles the Second! Read the simple, plain facts upon which all the histories agree, and you at once see that nine tenths of the bloodshed and cruelty that is commonly attributed to religious zeal can be directly traced either to the evil passions of men who have ruined themselves by their vices, or else to the cold-blooded skepticism of men

who believe in nothing, human or divine, except the accomplishing of their own purposes. Such men have, indeed, often been cunning enough to use the genuine convictions of others as instruments to serve their turn. When sincerely religious men have been fooled into work of this kind, their very sincerity may sometimes have rendered them more inflexible and unrelenting than others. But men of this type have seldom been themselves the prime movers of persecution."

"But I thought that persecution was the logical result of certain forms of religion?"

"It is, and every such form of religion is false. No such result logically follows from the gospel. And even in the false religions, as a matter of fact, these logical results usually sleep until they are aroused by some one who has a personal interest at stake. The worshipers of Diana do not trouble themselves until the silversmiths find that their trade is in peril. And as a rule the perse-

cuting has been done either through official personages who served as mere instruments, or through mobs of vile people, by leaders who secretly sneered at the very religion they used as a pretext, while the great body of really devout adherents of the religion have looked on, approvingly or pityingly, as mere spectators. There may have been thousands of exceptional instances in which religious zeal was really and intelligently prominent among the motives of the persecutors. But the rule is the other way, and its cases are counted by millions."

"You say that a persecuting religion is necessarily false. Have true Christians, then, never been persecutors?"

"Never, as the result of their religion. As I have just said, the larger proportion of professedly pious persecutors are the merest hypocrites. Exceptionally, however, true lovers of the Bible have been implicated in outbreaks of bigotry and fanaticism. They have justified the most disgraceful deeds by

the Scriptures, and have even used the sacred writings, against reason and conscience, to inflame themselves to the doing of wrong. But in every such instance they have flagrantly violated the teachings of the Bible. The spirit they have manifested has not been that of Christ, but of human depravity, taking on a Christian mask in order to discredit Christianity. But wholesome food is not an evil because a madman may thereby be strengthened to commit excesses. Education is not wrong even if a bad man, by being educated, acquires a greater power for evil."

"But how are we to judge among those who profess to be Christians, so as to tell whether those who persecute are really the sincere Christians or not?"

"In many instances there is plenty of evidence. But there is a better method of judging. Instead of estimating the personal characters of people, estimate by the presence of the Bible with them, and its apparent in-

fluence over them. The actual effects of the Scriptures are more tangible facts than the professions made by human beings. Dr. Stowe says some good things about this. Please hand me the book, and I will find them for you."

He found the place, and I read :

"In the midst of Christian churches, where the Bible is read every day, there are the dishonest, the licentious, the bloodthirsty and the villainous. True, but are these dishonest, licentious, bloodthirsty, villainous people in Christian communities the men who love and read the Bible, or the reverse? Which are the families generally that rear the industrious, frugal, intelligent, useful citizens?—the families that despise and neglect the Bible, or the families that revere and study it? Are the men generally who neither believe nor love the Bible, who neither regard nor study it, better men than their neighbors who believe, love and obey the Bible? Is the Bible generally a favorite

book in grog-shops and gambling-houses and brothels? Is it a book which cheats and swindlers and rogues especially love to study?"

I paused, and my friend remarked :

“That covers this matter of persecution for conscience’ sake, as well as the whole argument for the religion of Christ from its fruits. The true measure of the Christianity of any body of people is not the number of persons who profess it, or the intensity of their professions, but the extent to which the Bible is studied and obeyed. The great period of persecution by nominal Christians began some centuries before the time of Luther, and lasted for three or four generations after Luther, until the training of those centuries had gradually become effaced. But those centuries constitute a period in which the Bible had become almost forgotten by Christians. In thousands of monasteries, courts and private libraries copies were indeed preserved, but they were not generally

circulated or read, even among the clergy. I was reading yesterday in the history of Germany by Kohlrausch. Just look at that passage.”

As he spoke he took up the volume from the table, and opened it to where he had a leaf turned down. I read :

“Out of all the principal leading members of the clerical body throughout the Swiss confederation at the commencement of the sixteenth century, there were not three who had ever read the Bible; and when the people of Valais received about this time a letter from Zurich in which was quoted a sentence from the sacred volume, only one man was to be found who knew the book, and even what he knew was by hearsay.”

While I was reading Mr. Tompkins stepped to a case of shelves and took down a little old book in blue pasteboard covers, entitled “Biblical Anecdotes,” by James Townley.

“I know but little,” said he, “in regard to this witness, but the statements he makes concerning the age of the Reformation are of precisely the same import with those in which all reputable historians agree. Here is one :

“‘Even the liberal and learned Ximenes,’ the man who procured the editing of the Complutensian Polyglot, ‘was so far swayed by the sentiments of the Church to which he belonged that when the bishop of Granada caused the Psalms, the Gospel and Epistles to be translated into *Arabic*, for the use of the Moriscos, he censured him for it, declaring that “whenever the BIBLE should be translated into the vulgar tongue, it would be of pernicious consequence to Christianity.”’

“Here is another :

“‘Stephanus relates an anecdote of a certain doctor of the Sorbonne who, speaking of the Reformers, expressed his surprise at their mode of reasoning by exclaiming, “I wonder why these youths are constantly

quoting the New Testament? I was more than fifty years old before I knew anything of a New Testament." And Albert, archbishop and elector of Mentz, in the year 1530, having accidentally met with a Bible, opened it, and having read some pages, observed, "Indeed, I do not know what this book is, but this I see—that everything in it is against *us*." Even Carolostadius, who was afterward one of the Reformers, acknowledged that he never began to read the Bible till eight years after he had taken his highest degree in divinity. In some churches in Germany, Aristotle's ethics were read instead of the gospel.' One passage more. It is concerning Leo the Tenth, the pope under whom the Reformation began: 'He was munificent to men of genius and literature, but infidel in his principles and licentious in his practice. It was he who said to Cardinal Bembo, one of his secretaries, "How profitable hath this fable of Jesus been to us and our predecessors!"' "

“These are specimens,” said Mr. Tompkins. “Not the Bible, but the neglect of it, is to blame for the persecution as well as the barbarism which preceded the Reformation, and the bloodshed which followed it. When the Reformers had brought the Bible within the reach of the masses of the people, when, after a few generations, the effects of the old training had largely died out, and the effects of the training derived from the open Bible had superseded it, religious civil persecutions in Protestant countries came to an end. And I’ll warrant that you will find that the more thoroughly conversant men are with the Bible, the more confident they will be, as a rule, of the correctness of their own views, and the more truly liberal in the spirit they display toward those who differ with them. They can afford to be liberal, and are not afraid to be so.”

CHAPTER XXII.

LAST DAYS OF VACATION.

THE few remaining days of vacation sped rapidly by. So far as severe mental labor was concerned, this had been no vacation to me, but rather a time of intense application. In the changes it involved and in the predominance of outdoor life that was connected with it, in the newness of the studies pursued and of the methods of pursuing them, it had the effect of recreation. Coming just as it did, it was a time of unusual advantage to me. But as a general thing, I would not recommend precisely this method of spending vacations. In the present instance, perhaps, I was only justified by the importance of the crisis through which I was passing.

I must not crowd these pages with further

details. I had many more eager talks, however, with the minister and the farmer, and spent many an hour in turning over volumes and ascertaining and considering facts. We studied and discussed various points additional to those that have been already named.

I had, for example, been previously accustomed to say that "the argument from the fruits of Christianity proved as much on one side as on the other. If there were many good Christians, there were also many bad ones. It was difficult to tell on which side lay the balance of the argument. If the good deeds of Christians are proof of the truth of Christianity, are not their bad deeds and the good deeds of irreligious men disproof of the same? And who shall tell which is the stronger, the proof or the disproof? Who will venture to pronounce a verdict here?"

This had been my view. But my attention was now called to the fact that the uniform common sense of mankind has given a

verdict in this case, and continually repeats its verdict, that in this verdict people of every class agree, and that none are more decided upon this point than the bitterest enemies of Christianity, albeit they proclaim their judgment unintentionally and unwillingly.

Scoundrels, wishing to gain the confidence of people in order to wrong them, frequently assume the mask of a pretended evangelical religious experience. Why do they not rather assume the mask of atheism or infidelity? The answer is plain. They know that the former will serve their turn, while the latter will not. They act upon the assumption that everybody knows that genuine Bible piety affords the best credentials that a man can have. The generality of men have so much confidence in the Christian religion that it is worth the while of knaves to ape it, while they have no corresponding confidence in any of the forms of opposition to Christianity. In other words, all men who

know anything about it, whether they are the friends or the enemies of the religion of Christ, know that this religion does produce a decided overbalance of good fruits. They know this, and practically act upon it, whether they confess it in words or not.

Take up any daily paper, and you find a long catalogue of crimes recorded in its columns. Nearly all are committed by people who either have no religious convictions or have convictions at variance with those of evangelical Christians. Yet you never find it blazoned in startling head-lines, "A well-known neglecter of the Bible whips his child to death." "A regular non-attendant on religious services convicted of fraud and peculation." "A noted infidel accused of forgery." But let the perpetrator of such deeds be a Christian minister or a Sunday-school teacher or a church member, and forthwith all the resources of type are employed to herald the fact. It stands boldly out in the headings of the columns. It is

dilated upon in swelling sentences, with exclamation points after them. Why this difference? The venders of news know what varieties of scandal will be regarded as most remarkable, and will therefore sell best. And they know that ordinary crimes, committed by undistinguished people who are not known as Christians, are so very commonplace that no one cares to buy the accounts of them. There is nothing remarkable in such crimes. They are simply what might be expected. But these people also know that these same crimes, committed by persons who are equally undistinguished, but who are known as *Christian* men or women, appear to the public in a different light. They will present themselves as a comparative novelty. They will create a sensation. It is worth while to advertise them in the prominent headings. People will buy papers for the sake of this rare piece of news. Could there be a more unequivocal proof of the general uniform con-

viction of men that Christianity so improves the character of its professors as to make it far more remarkable for one of them to do overt wrongs than for others, similarly circumstanced, to do the same?

Starting from this point of departure, no one can doubt either the extent or the excellence of the influence of the Bible either upon individuals or communities. This book is not a humbug; but if not a humbug, it is what it professes to be—namely, a divine revelation.

I was also led to observe that the internal character of the book is not merely that of a generally truthful record, such as we might anywhere find, but that of a book appealing at every point to human experience—appealing to it with an accuracy and precision wholly remarkable, displaying character in aspects entirely unaccountable except on the theory of a supernatural revelation.

This is a thing not to be taken on the authority of others, and not to be seen at a

glance by our own eyes. It is rather a conviction that steadily grows upon one who habitually studies the word with that reverence which its character demands. It is a rationally founded conviction, but the reasons of it most intelligibly appear in a long series of personal experiences, and these it takes time to develop. Yet he who has felt them finds it no more possible to doubt the reality of the Bible religion than to doubt any of the other well-established facts of common life.

I also noticed that the historical facts recorded in the Scriptures and connected with the mission of Christ occupy a position altogether unique and central in human history. As the Gulf Stream is to the ocean, so is this story to the whole story of humanity. This is certain as a matter of fact, whatever may be the character of our current accounts of the life and mission of Jesus. Hence it is impertinent to object to any

alleged phenomena occurring within this stream that similar phenomena are unknown outside of it, for in the very nature of things we may here look for peculiar phenomena. Within this circle of affairs miracles, for instance, may occur, even if they never occur without it. The question whether they have actually occurred is one of mere fact, and is to be settled by evidence.

Moreover, the uniqueness of the Bible and of the position it occupies affords a peculiar presumption in its favor. How could it have maintained a vigorous existence for so long unless there were something to exist? It cannot be an unreality. As all things are in a general sense a divine revelation, so this particular thing must be in some peculiar sense a divine revelation.

I had long been somewhat familiar with the ordinary historical evidences cited by Christian apologists. I knew that no one could doubt that the so-called orthodox

Christians of the present day generally receive the books of our Bible, and no others, as the ancient, true, inspired word of God, containing the only true, divine religion. This is manifest from the peculiar reverence shown to the Bible. Christians quote it and expound it and pray from it and preach it. It has a special prominence in their acts of public worship. They form catalogues of its books, defend it, write commentaries, make translations, appeal to the Bible as authoritative. If we look back three centuries, to the time of the Reformation, we can have no doubt that evangelical Christians then regarded the Bible in the same light. They, too, preached and expounded and commented and translated. *And there has never been a date in history since the times of the apostles when the same thing was not true.* In the few fragments of literature that have been handed down to us from between the death of Jesus and that of John, more than two hundred quotations

are made from nineteen or twenty different books of our Scriptures. In the succeeding century at least thirty-six writers, some portions of the works of each of whom are still extant, mention or quote from the Bible, while in one century more the literature of the Scriptures had multiplied itself into libraries. Our received opinion as to the canon of the Scriptures has not been determined, as a brilliant modern writer sneeringly alleges, by the majority vote of an ecclesiastical council, but by a vast body of evidence, of which the decisions of councils constitute but an unimportant part.

Backward from the times of the apostles the evidence is just as complete, and hardly less copious, that the books of the Old Testament, as fast as they were written, were in the same way received by the Jews as the word of God.

As to the propriety of thus receiving these books, and as to the question whether all of them stand on an equal footing or whether

certain other books may not stand on the same footing, there is some difference of opinion among the witnesses. But as to the *fact* that the books of our Bible, and no others, were currently accepted as scriptural, there is positively no diversity of statement whatever, up to the time of the separation of Protestant and Roman Catholic opinions.

Now, all this weight of testimony, strengthened as it is by every circumstance that can render evidence trustworthy, goes to prove not only the correctness of our present canon of the Scriptures, but also the reality of the miracles and the genuineness of the prophecies recorded in the Scriptures, as also the fact of the wonderful propagation of Christianity in the early years of its existence.

These latter facts, moreover, and in particular the principal miracles wrought by Christ and his apostles, are confirmed by a vast body of evidence of various kinds separate from that which directly bears on

the canonical authority of the Scriptures. And these things, being proved, conclusively prove a supernatural divine origin for this religion and its sacred writings.

Considering these and like truths, I found it wholly impossible to doubt that God had actually given the Bible to men as a special revelation, authenticated by wonderful works and by the continued presence of the Holy Ghost. A hundred points of detail yet remained unsettled in my mind, but of the main central fact I now felt entirely sure.

Meanwhile, a change had taken place in my mental and moral habits. I now prayed regularly, and took delight in prayer. While my intellectual interest in the Scriptures had grown rather than diminished, I had also come to feel an interest in them of a very different description—a sense of companionship, a feeling of affection.

Since the evening I have mentioned, when I rose in the prayer-meeting, I had made no further public committal of myself. I pre-

sume I should if I had been urged to it. Whether it would have been better I cannot now say. People differ. Some want help and sympathy and encouragement in their mental conflicts with regard to personal religious consecration. Others rather need to be left alone, that they may work the problem through for themselves according to the peculiar laws of their own organization. I do not know which course would have been wisest in my case. As it happens, they left me alone.


I had continued to attend the prayer-meetings. I found a certain peculiar, inexplicable attraction in them. I had also quite naturally fallen into the habit of talking with religious people on religious affairs, in which I now felt a deep interest.

During all this time I was often reproaching myself in private for my want of feeling. I had once imagined and openly said that if I held such and such gospel beliefs it would be with feelings of intense alarm or

restless anxiety. My conduct would be very different from that of most of the Christians I knew. I now found myself actually holding those opinions, and yet eating and drinking and sleeping as usual. I had moods of intense uneasiness in view of my sins and of my eternal destinies. I had moods in which deep horror fell upon me in view of the moral debasement of my fellow-beings and the perils to which they were exposed, and in which I was inspired with ardent longings to labor for their salvation. I also had moods of trustfulness and of sweet resting upon the promises of God. But my prevailing mood was simply that of a growing interest in religious affairs. I was frequently distressed at my lack of deeper emotions and clearer decisions.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A DECIDED COURSE.

OON after my return to college, I said to the student who occupied the room over mine, and who was known as a plain, steady Christian :

“When will you start your hall prayer-meeting?”

“Don’t know as we’ll start it at all,” he replied, in a tone that indicated surprise, and even offence, at *my* having asked such a question.

I said no more, but I noticed that he kept watching me. After tea I saw him strolling around the campus with one or two other fellows who roomed in our hall, and who were currently known as “pious,” apparently engaged in earnest conversation. In the evening there came a knock at my door. I

pulled the string that hung above the table, and my neighbor entered.

“Mr. Luke,” said he, “I don’t know why you asked about our prayer-meeting, but we have resolved to start it to-night, at half-past nine, in my room. We shall be glad to have you attend if you choose;” and he shut the door and hurried up stairs.

There was in his manner such a mixture of fear, mistrust and defiance that I was at once amused, irritated and conscience-stricken. I half made up my mind to let him and his set alone for a group of cowardly fellows who did not know how to meet a man halfway, and then I asked myself whether his conduct really reflected the impression I had made upon the praying members of the college. On consideration, it really did not seem very strange to me if such were the case. And then it clearly appeared that there was but one possible course for me to take—namely, to go to work and counteract all such impressions.

I might meet with difficulties. Opposition I did not much care for; I could easily defy that. I had accustomed myself to take the opposite side of things. But how would it be with the suspicions of those who were known as Christians? How would it be with the charge of "playing pious in order to boot-lick the faculty"? How would it be with my mistakes and failures when I should make mistakes and failures? As I pondered, the cross I had to bear grew heavy. It would have lightened my burden had my friends who were to meet in the room above been frank and cordial. They were not. They were prepared to distrust any professions I might make. They evidently supposed that I meant to annoy them. They had grimly resolved to endure persecution for the gospel's sake. They would not be easily convinced. How could I join them in their season of devotion without involving us all in an atmosphere of constraint? Regarding each other thus, what could the prayer-

meeting be but a hollow mockery of the notion of loving conference of pious souls with one another and with the Saviour?

I had no doubt as to what duty required me to do. I do not know that I hesitated for a moment in regard to the doing of it. But it seemed very difficult, and kept growing more and more so. I was nearly phren-sied. I felt somewhat like one laboring under an attack of stage-fright. I tried to reassure myself. I said to myself, "Keep cool, and don't be foolish. You have always looked down on these fellows and regarded them as your inferiors. Shame on you to be afraid of them now! You will soon compel them to trust you." But the fear and trouble grew upon me, nevertheless. My efforts at self-control were unavailing. I slipped down upon my knees and told the dear Father in heaven how helpless I was, and asked him to stretch out his hand and guide me. I attended the meeting that evening, and forced myself to tell those who

were present, in a few words, of what had occurred during the summer, and of my determination to be a Christian. They were evidently astonished, and did not altogether credit what I said. They could not quite convince themselves that it was prudent to trust me. But they determined to watch and encourage me, so that, at least, my blood might not be upon their skirts.

I did not blame them. How could they help distrusting me? Yet their withholding of confidence was my sorest trial and my greatest hindrance. I thought of it bitterly that night. For days it made my Christian walk a thing of grim resolve and of almost petulant struggling, instead of the thing of joy and beauty it ought to have been. This state of affairs might have been indefinitely prolonged but for those daily informal hall prayer-meetings. I wish that all Christians, in college and out of it, better understood the value of just such gatherings. After a while confidence was established in my sincerity,

and I was known in college as a converted skeptic.

But my path was by no means thornless. The old doubts would occasionally return and assert their power as they had never done in the days of my carelessness. And then, although I sometimes felt that God was present and helping me, I yet at other times seemed to myself to make such blunders as proved that I had no help from him. I had often imagined what kind of a Christian I would be if I ever became a Christian, but I now found myself not like my ideal, but like those imperfect believers whom I had despised and ridiculed. I was greatly puzzled in regard to the very rudiments of a Christian experience. What was conversion? What was it to come to Christ? to give one's heart to him? Was it what I had already experienced? Had the Holy Spirit truly wrought in me the new birth, or was it a something yet awaiting me?

CHAPTER XXIV.

RETROSPECT.

I DO not wish to be understood as intimating that mine is the only, or even the most common, type of a genuine religious experience. I think that many Christians, and perhaps nearly all, know that they are converted just at the moment when the conversion occurs. With me, and probably with not a few others, it has been different. At the time of our conversion we were only aware that a change of some sort had taken place in our being, but did not till long afterward know that that change was conversion. Many, perhaps, never so recognize their change, and are therefore never able to tell just when they were converted. I think that some of the best Christians I ever knew belong to this last class.

A time came when I found that I had already given my powers to the service of Christ. I was conscious of having endeavored for some time past to do his will. I had every day been performing duties just because it seemed to me that he wished me to perform them. And as I now questioned my heart in regard to it, I felt sure that my love had gone with my services. I felt myself to be very imperfect, but I also felt that, by the grace of God, I was entirely determined. Questioning as to when this determination began, I could but trace it back to that first prayer-meeting which I had attended with my uncle and aunt Tompkins. Since then I had been growing—not always rapidly and symmetrically, but yet, on the whole, steadily growing. I now ventured to hope, therefore, that I was really a renewed person, and in due time professed my faith, entering into covenant with a Christian church.

My experience has since been varied, but

I trust that, by God's help, I am toiling on. The prayer-meeting and the Sunday-school, so intimately connected with my conversion and with my coming into the light as a Christian, are especially endeared to me. And the protracted doubtings and examinations through which I passed before I understood in what sense the Bible is the word of God, and became convinced that it is indeed his word, have rendered the sacred writings doubly precious in my sight.

It gives me pleasure to be able to state that Mr. Curr, in that conversation with the minister an account of which is given in my nineteenth chapter, became interested in the facts of natural science contained in the Bible, and was led to devote some time to the study of them. At first he was simply surprised that such old records should be so accurate in matters of this sort. Then he began also to examine the moral and religious teachings of the book. Acquaintance with it gave him confidence in its truthfulness.

Still further investigation led him to acknowledge both its divine authority and its claims upon his own heart. He repented of his unbelief and blasphemy, and publicly confessed himself a follower of Jesus.

Looking back upon his experience and mine, I am led to ask whether it is indeed desirable for any one to have a prolonged conflict with skepticism before arriving at a settled faith.

Men older and wiser than I have answered this question with an unqualified affirmative. The reasons they assign have weight, but are they decisive?

If we affirm that the way in which Providence actually guides certain persons is an indication of what is desirable for them, we must certainly admit that a conflict with skepticism is thus desirable. But it does not follow that the same is true of any other persons. If a man has his arms and legs broken, we may doubtless infer that Providence has seen this to be a desirable dis-

cipline for him. But we cannot infer that it is generally desirable for people to have their arms and legs broken, and least of all would one be wise who should voluntarily break his own arms and legs. But he would be as wise as the one who should voluntarily become an infidel for the sake of experiencing the same providential guidance that had been vouchsafed to some of his neighbors.

We can even see *how* God has overruled some conflicts of this kind to the benefit of those who have experienced them. A faith that apparently would otherwise have been enervated and superficial has been deepened and strengthened by the conflicts it has been compelled to wage. So a robber may from his life in the open air gain physical strength and endurance. And in both instances there may conceivably be other and better ways of accomplishing the desirable result.

Such a thing as reverent, rational inquiry into the foundations of our faith is a possibility. Without tearing down the house

and scattering its material one may examine the foundations, and dig down and replace them where they are defective. Without ever ceasing to have convictions and act upon them, one may examine his convictions one by one, and give up those that are untenable and amend those that are defective. It may be rational to stand upon something while examining the something upon which we stand. It is very irrational to try to stand on nothing while doing the same. If we find that we must saw off any branch, it makes a radical difference on which side of the saw we sit while performing the operation.

Now, this cautious, reverent doubting is very different from that reckless unbelief which is now commonly called skepticism. The former clings to what it has received as truth, and abandons it only on perceiving it to be groundless or on being able to replace it by something better. The latter throws away everything at the outset, and addresses

itself to the task of constructing truth, or fancied truth, out of nothing. The former involves the solving of as many problems, the meeting of as many difficulties, the conquering of as many enemies, as the latter. It is lacking in no element of discipline possessed by the latter, and has largely the advantage of it in its larger actual reach and apprehension of truth.

But it may be said that most minds are incapable of being thus reverently and believably skeptical, and that most minds, therefore, need the training given by an experience of doubt in its lower and less reverent forms. I do not know how the fact may be, but I question whether a mind incapable of reverent and confiding investigation can safely trust itself among the lower and reckless forms of doubt. For such minds I question whether blind credulity is not better than blind incredulity. Under the lead of the former, to be sure, they may be largely in the wrong, but under that of the

latter will they not be wholly so? He who, being cast overboard among the billows of disbelief, is able to buffet his way back to the boat, should still better have been able, had he remained in the boat, to guide it among the billows.

Careless skepticism involves serious perils. It tends to blunt our discriminating powers, so as to disable us from telling truth from error. Truth and right are so closely connected that such skepticism brings our moral characters into danger.

And the conflict with actual, indiscriminating skepticism almost inevitably leaves scars, and even open wounds, that never wholly heal in the present life. I find in myself weaknesses, biases to wrong, evil habits of mind and heart, generated by my former free thinking, that I would now give many years of my life to be well rid of. I think that this is the experience of most reclaimed doubters and converted infidels.

People who lead lives of unquestioning,

unintelligent Christian faith may be on a comparatively low level, yet they may be tolerably useful and happy, and are far better off than those who live lives of unquestioning, unintelligent doubt, who have no positive religious and moral convictions, and hardly feel the need of any, and still farther so than those thoughtful doubters whose doubting has served only to plunge them into deeper doubt, who disbelieve all things and hate whatever they disbelieve.

High above these, in felicity as well as in worth, are those who have fought their way through opposing doubts to safe and firm standing-ground. They have been soiled and torn in the conflict, they are measurably weary and spent and weak, but they know what they have learned.

But most blessed of all is he who from early childhood has had faith in God and knowledge of the truth ; who, beginning to think for himself, has dug down to the solid rock, resting one and another of his childish

impressions thereon, and throwing away those which could not be so based; whose convictions have thus become truths of his own ascertaining, and no longer mere statements made to him by another; who has become so permeated with verity that error falls harmless from him, as the viper from the hand of Paul; who knows the right rather because he has proved it than because he has disproved all its opposites; who has hardened his muscles upon the natural difficulties of obscurity and uncertainty rather than upon the artificial ones of sophistry and scoffing doubt; who has proved his skill and courage rather by combating the unbelief of others in their behalf than in combating that of his own heart. Remember, you who have not yet begun to wander, that you have before you possibilities of victorious manhood such as I and others like me no longer possess.

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Farmer Tompkins and his Bibles



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