

# Supplementary Readings

To be used with *The Shaping of American Congregationalism*

Readings in the History and Polity of the National  
Association of Congregational Christian Churches

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Rev. Dr. Arlin T. Larson, editor

## PREFACE

Learning about the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches is not easy. No comprehensive history has been written. Only a few of the founders remain active. No seminary offers a course tailored to it. Months or years of participation, informal contacts, and overhearing the scuttlebutt are usually required. The "Congregational History and Polity" course is designed to accelerate the learning curve by immersing the student in modern Congregationalism's traditions and practices, as well as in the more comprehensive Congregational story.

We see this as essential for seminarians seeking a firm foundation in the community they are preparing to serve. Equally important is educating the many ministers who come to Congregationalism from other traditions. Church members seeking a better understanding of their faith may also appreciate a package that brings widely scattered materials together.

The first volume, for instance, *of Readings in the History and Polity of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches* collects Congregational reflections of the nature of the church(es) as recorded in the *Congregationalist* magazine. The articles collected are neither comprehensive nor definitive; we are not even certain to what extent they are representative. What can, however, be said is that the authors are men and women active in the Association whose views the magazine's editors deemed worthy of distribution.

At the very least the readings collected inform the reader of the parameters of discussion within the NACCC. They will additionally provide an introduction to leaders of the Congregational way and hopefully some insight into this movement's peculiar contribution to the Body of Christ.

This project is in its early stages. We would appreciate your suggestions and notice of our errors and omissions.

Rev. Dr. Arlin T. Larson, editor

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## INTRODUCTION

Though of paramount importance to the sixteenth century founders of Congregationalism, and to the twentieth century founders of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches, polity concerns have never constituted the sole focus of Congregationalism. Congregationalists have been deeply involved in the full range of American intellectual, cultural, social, and political life. The Supplementary Readings will engage you in this wider scope of concerns. Most are excerpted from longer works, hoping to give the flavor of the authors' style and letting them define the issues in their own terms. Perhaps you will want to follow up with the complete version of some. The Congregational Library in Boston is available to help you find documents that are no longer in print.

These authors expressed concerns and views in ways considered exemplary or definitive by their contemporaries. It behooves us to pay attention. To understand earlier sections of the path we are now on. To gain insight into contemporary situations. Perhaps even to be awakened to issues and modes of understanding to which our ancestors were better attuned than we. Are certain actual events the will and action of God & others not? When, for example, Edward Johnson marvels at the "Wonder-working Providence of Zion's Savior," which he sees at work in the Puritan migration, it makes our contemporary sense of God's working seems vague & indefinite. As mainline Protestantism is challenged by Pentecostalism and evangelicalism, the early Congregationalists' focus on conversion and church membership again becomes relevant. Urbanism, multiculturalism, immigration? We have still not resolved the issues attended to by Josiah Strong and Washington Gladden.

Some works may feel vaguely alien, even objectionable, from a twentieth century perspective. It could be literary style. The use of "f" for "s" and "v" for "u" (and vice versa), the "thee's" and "thou's" of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Or it may be more substantive. Jonathon Edward's "angry God." William Ellery Channing's debunking of traditional doctrines. Josiah Strong's celebration of (and challenge to) the "Anglo-Saxon" race. The point, however, is not so much to judge as to understand the depth and scope of Congregational faith, and to appreciate its enormous creativity. Hopefully to let our minds be expanded by our forebearers and join the dialogue with them in contemporary circumstances.

# *Who wrote the Bible?*

A BOOK FOR THE PEOPLE

BY

WASHINGTON GLADDEN



BOSTON AND NEW YORK  
HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN AND COMPANY  
The Riverside Press, Cambridge  
1892

# WHO WROTE THE BIBLE?

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## CHAPTER I.

### A LOOK INTO THE HEBREW BIBLE.

THE aim of this volume is to put into compact and popular form, for the benefit of intelligent readers, the principal facts upon which scholars are now generally agreed concerning the literary history of the Bible. The doctrines taught in the Bible will not be discussed; its claims to a supernatural origin will not be the principal matter of inquiry; the book will concern itself chiefly with those purely natural and human agencies which have been employed in writing, transcribing, editing, preserving, transmitting, translating, and publishing the Bible.

The writer of this book has no difficulty in believing that the Bible contains supernatural elements. He is ready to affirm that other than natural forces have been employed in producing it. It is to these superhuman elements in it that reference and appeal are most frequently made. But the Bible has a natural history also. It is a book among books. It is a phenomenon among

phenomena. Its origin and growth in this world can be studied as those of any other natural object can be studied. The old apple-tree growing in my garden is the witness to me of some transcendent truths, the shrine of mysteries that I cannot unravel. What the life is that was hidden in the seed from which it sprang, and that has shaped all its growth, coördinating the forces of nature, and producing this individual form and this particular variety of fruit,—this I do not know. There are questions here that no man of science can answer. Life in the seed of the apple as well as in the soul of man is a mystery. But there are some things about the apple-tree that may be known. I may know—if any one has been curious enough to keep the record—when the seed was planted, when the shoot first appeared above the ground, how many branches it had when it was five years old, how high it was when it was ten years old, when this limb and that twig were added, when the first blossom appeared, when that branch was grafted and those others were trimmed off. All this knowledge I may have gained; and in setting forth these facts, or such as these, concerning the natural history of the tree, I do not assume that I am telling all about the life that is in it. In like manner we may study the origin and growth of the Bible without attempting to decide the deeper questions concerning the inspiration of its writers and the meaning of the truths they reveal.

That the Bible has a natural as well as a supernatural history is everywhere assumed upon its pages. It was written as other books are written, and it was preserved and transmitted as other books are preserved and transmitted. It did not come into being in any such marvelous way as that in which Joseph Smith's "Book of Mormon," for example, is said to have been produced. The story is, that an angel appeared to Smith and told him where he would find this book; that he went to the spot designated, and found in a stone box a volume six inches thick, composed of thin gold plates, eight inches by seven, held together by three gold rings; that these plates were covered with writing in the "Reformed Egyptian" tongue, and that with this book were "the Urim and the Thummim," a pair of supernatural spectacles, by means of which he was able to read *and translate* this "Reformed Egyptian" language. This is the sort of story which has been believed, in this nineteenth century, by tens of thousands of Mormon votaries. Concerning the books of the Bible no such astonishing stories are told. Nevertheless some good people seem inclined to think that if such stories are not told, they might well be; they imagine that the Bible must have originated in a manner purely miraculous; and though they know very little about its origin, they conceive of it as a book that was written in heaven in the English tongue, divided there into chapters and verses, with head



lines and reference marks, printed in small pica, bound in calf, and sent down to earth by angels in its present form. What I desire to show is, that the work of putting the Bible into its present form was not done in heaven, but on earth; that it was not done by angels, but by men; that it was not done all at once, but a little at a time, the work of preparing and perfecting it extending over several centuries, and employing the labors of many men in different lands and long-divided generations. And this history of the Bible as a book, and of the natural and human agencies employed in producing it, will prove, I trust, of much interest to those who care to study it.

Mr. Huxley has written a delightful treatise on "A Piece of Chalk," and another on "The Crayfish;" a French writer has produced an entertaining volume entitled "The Story of a Stick;" the books of the Bible, considered from a scientific or bibliographical point of view, should repay our study not less richly than such simple, natural objects.

A great amount of study has been expended of late on the Scriptures, and the conclusions reached by this study are of immense importance. What is called the Higher Criticism has been busy scanning these old writings, and trying to find out all about them. What is the Higher Criticism? It is the attempt to learn from the Scriptures themselves the truth about their origin. It consists in a careful study of the lan-

guage of the books, of the manners and customs referred to in them, of the historical facts mentioned by them; it compares part with part, and book with book, to discover agreements, if they exist, and discrepancies, that they may be reconciled. This Higher Criticism has subjected these old writings to such an analysis and inspection as no other writings have ever undergone. Some of this work has undoubtedly been destructive. It has started out with the assumption that these books are in no respect different from other sacred books; that they are no more a revelation from God than the Zendavesta or the Nibelungen Lied is a revelation from God; and it has bent its energies to discrediting, in every way, the veracity and the authority of our Scriptures. But much of this criticism has been thoroughly candid and reverent, even conservative in its temper and purpose. It has not been unwilling to look at the facts; but it has held toward the Bible a devout and sympathetic attitude; it believes it to contain, as no other book in the world contains, the message of God to men; and it has only sought to learn from the Bible itself how that message has been conveyed. It is this conservative criticism whose leadership will be followed in these studies. No conclusions respecting the history of these writings will be stated which are not accepted by conservative scholars. Nevertheless it must be remembered that the results of conservative scholarship have been very imper-

fectly reported to the laity of the churches. Many facts about the Bible are now known by intelligent ministers of which their congregations do not hear. An anxious and not unnatural feeling has prevailed that the faith of the people in the Bible would be shaken if the facts were known. The belief that the truth is the safest thing in the world, and that the things which cannot be shaken will remain after it is all told, has led to the preparation of this volume.

I have no doubt, however, that some of the statements which follow will fall upon some minds with a shock of surprise. The facts which will be brought to light will conflict very sharply with some of the traditional theories about the Bible. Some of my readers may be inclined to fear that the foundations of faith are giving way. Let me, at the outset, request all such to suspend their judgment and read the book through before they come to such a conclusion. Doubtless it will be necessary to make some readjustment of theories; to look at the Bible less as a miraculous and more as a spiritual product; to put less emphasis upon the letter and more upon the spirit; but after all this is done it may appear that the Bible is worth more to us than it ever was before, because we have learned how rightly to value it.

The word "Bible" is not a biblical word. The Old Testament writings were in the hands of the

men who wrote the books of the New Testament, but they do not call these writings the Bible; they name them the Scriptures, the Holy Scriptures, the Sacred Writings, or else they refer to them under the names that were given to specific parts of them, as the Law, the Prophets, or the Psalms. Our word Bible comes from a word which began to be applied to the sacred writings as a whole about four hundred years after Christ. It is a Greek plural noun, meaning the books, or the little books. These writings were called by this plural name for about eight hundred years; it was not till the thirteenth century that they began to be familiarly spoken of as a single book. This fact, of itself, is instructive. For though a certain spiritual unity does pervade these sacred writings, yet they are a collection of books, rather than one book. The early Christians, who honored and prized them sufficiently, always spoke of them as "The Books," rather than as "The Book," — and their name was more accurate than ours.

The names Old and New Testament are Bible words; that is to say we find the names in our English Bibles, though they are not used to describe these books. Paul calls the old dispensation the old covenant; and that phrase came into general use among the early Christians as contrasted with the Christian dispensation which they called the new covenant; therefore Greek-speaking Christians used to talk about "the books

of the old covenant," and "the books of the new covenant;" and by and by they shortened the phrase and sometimes called the two collections simply "Old Covenant" and "New Covenant." When the Latin-speaking Christians began to use the same terms, they translated the Greek word "covenant" by the word "testament" which means a will, and which does not fairly convey the sense of the Greek word. And so it was that these two collections of sacred writings began to be called The Old Testament and The New Testament. It is the former of these that we are first to study.

When Jesus Christ was on the earth he often quoted in his discourses from the Jewish Scriptures, and referred to them in his conversations. His apostles and the other New Testament writers also quote freely from the same Scriptures, and books of the early Christian Fathers are full of references to them. What were these Jewish Scriptures?

At the time when our Lord was on the earth, the sacred writings of the Jews were collected in two different forms. The Palestinian collection, so called, was written in the Hebrew language, and the Alexandrian collection, called the Septuagint, in the Greek. For many years a large colony of devout and learned Jews had lived in Alexandria; and as the Greek language was spoken there, and had become their common speech, they translated their sacred writings into Greek.

This translation soon came into general use, because there were everywhere many Jews who knew Greek well enough but knew no Hebrew at all. When our Lord was on earth, the Hebrew was a dead language; it may have been the language of the temple, as Latin is now the language of the Roman Catholic mass; but the common people did not understand it; the vernacular of the Palestinian Jews was the Aramaic, a language similar to the Hebrew, sometimes called the later Hebrew, and having some such relation to it as the English has to the German tongue. There is some dispute as to the time when the Jews lost the use of their own language and adopted the Aramaic; many of the Jewish historians hold the view that the people who came back from the captivity to Jerusalem had learned to use the Aramaic as their common speech, and that the Hebrew Scriptures had to be interpreted when they were read to them. Others think that this change in language took place a little later, and that it resulted in great measure from the close intercourse of the Jews with the peoples round about them in Palestine, most of whom used the Aramaic. At any rate the change had taken place before the coming of Christ, so that no Hebrew was then spoken familiarly in Palestine. When "the Hebrew tongue" is mentioned in the New Testament it is the Aramaic that is meant, and not the ancient Hebrew. The Greek, on the other hand,

was a living language; it was spoken on the streets and in the markets everywhere, and many Jews understood it almost as well as they did their Aramaic vernacular, just as many of the people of Constantinople and the Levant now speak French more fluently than their native tongues. The Greek version of the Scriptures was, for this reason, more freely used by the Jews even in Palestine than the Hebrew original; it was from the Septuagint that Christ and his apostles made most of their quotations. Out of three hundred and fifty citations in the New Testament from the Old Testament writings about three hundred appear to be directly from the Greek version made at Alexandria. Between these two collections of sacred writings, the one written in Hebrew, then a dead language, and the other in Greek, — the one used by scholars only, and the other by the common people, — there were some important differences, not only in the phrasology and in the arrangement of the books, but in the contents themselves. Of these I shall speak more fully in the following chapters. It is to the Hebrew collection, which is the original of these writings, and from which our English Old Testament was translated, that we shall now give our attention. What were these Hebrew Scriptures of which all the writers of the New Testament knew, and from which they sometimes directly quote?

The contents of this collection were substan-

tially if not exactly the same as those of our Old Testament, but they were arranged in very different order. Indeed they were regarded as three distinct groups of writings, rather than as one book, and the three groups were of different degrees of sacredness and authority. Two of these divisions are frequently referred to in the New Testament, as *The Law* and *The Prophets*; and the threefold division is doubtfully hinted at in Luke xxiv. 44, where our Lord speaks of the predictions concerning himself which are found in the Law and the Prophets and in the Psalms.

The first of these holy books of the Jews was, then, *THE LAW* contained in the first five books of our Bible, known among us as the *Pentateuch*, and called by the Jews sometimes simply "*The Law*," and sometimes "*The Law of Moses*." This was supposed to be the oldest portion of their Scriptures, and was by them regarded as much more sacred and authoritative than any other portion. To Moses, they said, God spake face to face; to the other holy men much less distinctly. Consequently their appeal is most often to the law of Moses.

The group of writings known as "*The Prophets*" is subdivided into the *Earlier* and the *Later Prophets*. *The Earlier Prophets* comprise Joshua, the Judges, the two books of Samuel, counted as one, and the two books of the Kings, counted also as one. *The Later Prophets* comprise Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the twelve Minor

Prophets, the last books in our Old Testament, — Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. These twelve *were counted as one book*; so that there were four volumes of the earlier and four of the later prophets. Why the Jews should have called Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and the Kings books of the Prophets is not clear; perhaps because they were supposed to have been written by prophets; perhaps because prophets have a conspicuous place in their histories. This portion of the Hebrew Scriptures, containing the four historical books named and the fifteen prophetic books (reckoned, however, as four), was regarded by the Jews as standing next in sacredness and value to the book of the Law.

The third group of their Scriptures was known among them as Kethubim, or Writings, simply. Sometimes, possibly, they called it The Psalms, because the book of the Psalms was the initial book of the collection. It consisted of the Psalms, the Proverbs, Job, the Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, and the Chronicles. This group of writings was esteemed by the Jews as less sacred and authoritative than either of the other two groups; the authors were supposed to have had a smaller measure of inspiration. Respecting two or three of these books there was also some dispute among the rabbis, as to their right to be regarded as sacred Scripture.

Such, then, were the Hebrew Scriptures in the days of our Lord, and such was the manner of their arrangement.

They had, indeed, other books of a religious character, to which reference is sometimes made in the books of the Bible. In Numbers xxi. 14, 15, we have a brief war song quoted from "The Book of the Wars of Jehovah," a collection of which we have no other knowledge. In Joshua x. 13, the story of the sun standing still over Gibeon is said to have been quoted from "The Book of Jasher," and in 2 Samuel i. 18, the beautiful "Song of the Bow," written by David on the death of Saul and Jonathan, is said to be contained in the "Book of Jasher." It is evident that this must have been a collection of lyrics celebrating some of the great events of Hebrew history. The title seems to mean "The Book of the Just." The exploits of the worthies of Israel probably furnished its principal theme.

In 1 Chronicles xxix. 29, we read: "Now the acts of David the king, first and last, behold they are written in the History of Samuel the Seer, and in the History of Nathan the Prophet, and in the History of Gad the Seer." There is no reason to doubt that the first named of these is the history contained in the books of Samuel in our Bible; but the other two books are lost. We have another reference to the "History of Nathan," in 2 Chronicles ix. 29, — the concluding words of the sketch of King Solomon's life:

"Now the rest of the acts of Solomon, first and last, are they not written in the History of Nathan the Prophet, and in the Prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite, and in the Visions of Iddo the Seer concerning Jeroboam the son of Nebat?" Here are two more books of which we have no other knowledge; their titles quoted upon the page of this chronicle are all that is left of them. A similar reference, in the last words of the sketch of Solomon's son Rehoboam, gives us our only knowledge of the "Histories of Shemaiah the Prophet."

In the Kings and in the Chronicles, reference is repeatedly made to the "Books of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel," and the "Books of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah," under which titles volumes that are now lost are brought to our notice. Undoubtedly much of the history in the biblical books of Kings and Chronicles was derived from these ancient annals. They are the sources from which the writers of these books drew their materials.

We are also told in 2 Chronicles xxvi. 22, that Isaiah wrote a history of the "Acts of Uzziah," which is wholly lost.

Other casual references are made to historical writings of various sorts, composed by prophets and seers, and thus apparently accredited by the biblical writers as authoritative utterances of divine truth. Why were they suffered to perish? Has not Emerson certified us that

"One accent of the Holy Ghost  
The heedless world has never lost"?

But this is a fond exaggeration. Mr. Emerson was certainly not himself inspired when he uttered it. Many and many an accent of the Holy Ghost has been lost by this heedless world. And it is not at all improbable that some of these histories of Nathan and Gad and Shemaiah held vital and precious truth, — truth that the world has needed. The very fact that they are hopelessly lost raises some curious questions about the method of revelation. Is it to be supposed that the Providence which suffers whole books to be lost by men would infallibly guarantee those that remain against errors in the copies, and other imperfections? As a matter of fact, we know that He has not so protected any of them.

Still I doubt not that Providence has kept for us the best of this Hebrew literature. To say that it is the best literature that the world has produced is to say very little. It is separated widely from all other sacred writings. Its constructive ideas are as far above those of the other books of religion as the heavens are above the earth. I pity the man who has had the Bible in his hand from his infancy, and who has learned in his maturer years something of the literature of the other religions, but who now needs to have this statement verified. True it is that we find pure maxims, elevated thoughts, genuine faith, lofty morality, in many of the Bibles of the other

racess. True it is that in some of them visions are vouchsafed us of the highest truths of religion, of the very substance of the gospel of the Son of God. But when we take the sacred books of the other religions in their entirety, and compare them with the sacred writings of the Hebrews, the superiority of these in their fundamental ideas, in the conceptions that dominate them, in the grand uplifting visions and purposes that vitalize them, can be felt by any man who has any discernment of spiritual realities. It is in these great ideas that the value of these writings consists, and not in any petty infallibility of phrase, or inerrancy of statement. They are the record, as no other book in the world is a record, of that increasing purpose of God which runs through the ages.

I hope that it will appear as the result of our studies, that one may continue to reverence the Scriptures as containing a unique and special revelation from God to men, and yet clearly see and frankly acknowledge the facts concerning their origin, and the human and fallible elements in them, which are not concealed, but lie upon their very face.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### HOW MUCH IS THE BIBLE WORTH?

OF the Bible as a book among books, of the human elements which enter into its composition, some account has been given in the preceding chapters. But in these studies the whole story of the Bible has not been told. There is need, therefore, that we should enlarge our view somewhat, and take more directly into account certain elements with which we have not hitherto been chiefly concerned.

Our study has, indeed, made a few things plain. Among them is the certainty that the Bible is not an infallible Book, in the sense in which it is popularly supposed to be infallible. When we study the history of the several books, the history of the canon, the history of the distribution and reproduction of the manuscript copies, and the history of the versions, — when we discover that the "various readings" of the differing manuscripts amount to one hundred and fifty thousand, the impossibility of maintaining the verbal inerrancy of the Bible becomes evident. We see how human ignorance and error have been suffered to mingle with this stream of living water



throughout all its course; if our assurance of salvation were made to depend upon our knowledge that every word of the Bible was of divine origin, our hopes of eternal life would be altogether insecure.

The book is not infallible historically. It is a veracious record; we may depend upon the truthfulness of the outline which it gives us of the history of the Jewish people; but the discrepancies and contradictions which appear here and there upon its pages show that its writers were not miraculously protected from mistakes in dates and numbers and the order of events.

It is not infallible scientifically. It is idle to try to force the narrative of Genesis into an exact correspondence with geological science. It is a hymn of creation, wonderfully beautiful and pure; the central truths of monotheistic religion and of modern science are involved in it; but it is not intended to give us the scientific history of creation, and the attempt to make it bear this construction is highly injudicious.

It is not infallible morally. By this I mean that portions of this revelation involve an imperfect morality. Many things are here commanded which it would be wrong for us to do. This is not saying that these commands were not divinely wise for the people to whom they were given; nor is it denying that the morality of the New Testament, which is the fulfillment and consummation of the moral progress which the book

records, is a perfect morality; it is simply asserting that the stages of this progress from a lower to a higher morality are here clearly marked; that the standards of the earlier time are therefore inadequate and misleading in these later times; and that any man who accepts the Bible as a code of moral rules, all of which are equally binding, will be led into the gravest errors. It is no more true that the ceremonial legislation of the Old Testament is obsolete than that large portions of the moral legislation are obsolete. The notions of the writers of these books concerning their duties to God were dim and imperfect; so were their notions concerning their duties to man. All the truth that they could receive was given to them; but there were many truths which they could not receive, which to us are as plain as the daylight.

Not to recognize the partialness and imperfection of this record in all these respects is to be guilty of a grave disloyalty to the kingdom of the truth. With all these facts staring him in the face, the attempt of any intelligent man to maintain the theoretical and ideal infallibility of all parts of these writings is a criminal blunder. Nor is there any use in loudly asserting the inerrancy of these books, with vehement denunciations of all who call it in question, and then in a breath admitting that there may be some errors and discrepancies and interpolations. Perfection is perfection. To stoutly affirm that a thing is

perfect, and then admit that it may be in some respects imperfect, is an insensate procedure. Infallibility is infallibility. The Scriptures are, or they are not, infallible. The admission that there may be a few errors gives every man the right, nay it lays upon him the duty, of finding what those errors are. Our friends who so sturdily assert the traditional theory can hardly be aware of the extent to which they stultify themselves when their sweeping and reiterated assertion that the Bible can *never* contain a mistake is followed, as it always must be, by their timid and deprecatory, "hardly ever." The old rabbinical theory, as adopted and extended by some of the post-Reformation theologians, that the Bible was verbally dictated by God and is absolutely accurate in every word, letter, and vowel-point, and that it is therefore blasphemy to raise a question concerning any part of it, is a consistent theory. Between this and a free but reverent inquiry into the Bible itself, to discover what human elements it contains and how it is affected by them, there is no middle ground. That it is useless and mischievous to make for the Bible claims that it nowhere makes for itself, — to hold and teach a theory concerning it which at once breaks down when an intelligent man begins to study it with open mind — is beginning to be very plain. The quibbling, the concealment, the disingenuousness which this method of using the Bible involves are not conducive to Christian integrity. This

kind of "lying for God" has driven hundreds of thousands already into irreconcilable alienation from the Christian church. It is time to stop it.

How did this theory of the infallibility of the Bible arise? Those who have followed these discussions to this point know that it has not always been held by the Christian church. The history of the canon, told with any measure of truthfulness, will make this plain. The history of the variations between the Septuagint and the Hebrew shows, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that this theory of the unchangeable and absolute divinity of the words of the Scripture had no practical hold upon transcribers and copyists in the early Jewish church. The New Testament writers could not have consistently held such a theory respecting the Old Testament books, else they would not have quoted them, as they did, with small care for verbal accuracy. They believed them to be substantially true, and therefore they give the substance of them in their quotations; but there is no such slavish attention to the letter as there must have been if they had regarded them as verbally dictated by God himself. The Christian Fathers were inclined, no doubt, to accept the rabbinical theories of inspiration respecting the Old Testament; but they sometimes avoid the difficulties growing out of manifest errors in the text by a theory of an inner sense which is faultless, frankly admitting that the natural meaning cannot always be de-

fended. As to the early Reformers, we have seen how freely they handled the Sacred Writings, submitting them to a scrutiny which they would not have ventured upon if they had believed concerning them what we have been taught. It was not until the period succeeding the Reformation that this dogma of Biblical Infallibility was clearly formulated and imposed upon the Protestant churches. As taught by Quenstedt and Voetius and Calovius, the dogma asserts that "not only the substance of truth and the views proposed in their minutest detail, but even the identical words, all and in particular, were supplied and dictated by the Holy Ghost. Not a word is contained in the Holy Scriptures which is not in the strictest sense inspired, the very interpunctuation not excepted. . . . Errors of any sort whatever, even verbal or grammatical, as well as all inelegancies of style, are to be denied as unworthy of the Divine Spirit who is throughout the primary author of the Bible."<sup>1</sup> This view was long maintained with all strictness, and many a man has been made a heretic for denying it. Within the last century the form of the doctrine has been somewhat modified by theologians, yet the substance of it is still regarded as essential orthodoxy. Dr. Charles Hodge, in his "Theology," vol. i. p. 152, says, "Protestants hold that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the word of God, writ-

<sup>1</sup> *The Doctrine of Sacred Scripture*, ii. p. 209.

ten under the inspiration of God the Holy Ghost, and are therefore infallible, and consequently free from all error, whether of doctrine, of fact, or of precept." And again (p. 163), "All the books of Scripture are equally inspired. All alike are infallible in what they teach." Such is the doctrine now held by the great majority of Christians. Intelligent pastors do not hold it, but the body of the laity have no other conception.

Whence is it derived? Where do the teachers quoted above get their authority for their affirmations?

Not, as we have seen, from any statements of the Bible itself. There is not one word in the Bible which affirms or implies that this character of inerrancy attaches to the entire collection of writings, or to any one of them.

The doctrine arose, as I have said, in the seventeenth century, and it was in part, no doubt, a reflection of the teaching of the later rabbins, whose fantastic notions about the origin of their sacred books I have before alluded to. It was also developed, as a polemical necessity, in the exigencies of that conflict with the Roman Catholic theologians which followed the Reformation. The eminent German scholar and saint, Professor Tholuck, gives the following account of its origin:

"In proportion as controversy, sharpened by Jesuitism, made the Protestant party sensible of an externally fortified ground of combat, in that same proportion did Protestantism seek, by the

exaltation of the outward authoritative character of the Sacred Writings, to recover that infallible authority which it had lost through its rejection of infallible councils and the infallible authority of the Pope. In this manner arose, *not earlier than the seventeenth century*, those sentiments which regarded the Holy Scripture as the infallible production of the Divine Spirit — in its entire contents and its very form — so that not only the sense but also the words, the letters, the Hebrew vowel points, and the very punctuation were regarded as proceeding from the Spirit of God.”<sup>1</sup> The fact that the doctrine had this origin is itself suspicious. A theory which is framed in the heat of a great controversy, by one party in the church, is apt to be somewhat extreme.

The strength of the doctrine lies, however, in the fact that it is a theological inference from the doctrine of God. “God is the author of the Bible,” men have said; “God is omniscient; he can make no mistakes; therefore the Book must be infallible. To deny that it is infallible is to deny that it is God’s book; if it is not his book it is worthless.” Or, putting it in another form, they have said, “The Bible is an inspired book. God is the source of inspiration. He cannot inspire men to write error. Therefore every word of the inspired book must be true.” This is what the logicians call an *a priori* argument. The view of what inspiration is, and of what the Bible

<sup>1</sup> *Theological Essays*, collected by George R. Noyes.

is, are deduced from our theory of God. It amounts to just this: If God is what we think him to be, he must do what seems wise to us. This is hardly a safe argument. Doubtless we would have said beforehand that if God, who is all-wise and all-powerful, should create a world, he would make one free from suffering and every form of evil. We find, however, that he has not made such a world. And it may be wiser for us, instead of making up our minds beforehand what God must do, to try and find out what he has done. It might seem to us, doubtless, that if he has given us a revelation, it must be a faultless revelation. But has he? That is the question. We can only know by studying the revelation itself. We have no right to determine beforehand what it must be. We might have said with equal confidence, that if God wished to have his truth taught in the world, he would certainly send infallible teachers. He has not done so. The treasure of his truth is in earthen vessels, to-day. Has it not always been so?

The trouble in this whole matter arises from the fact that men have made up their theories of the Bible out of their ideas about God, and have then gone to work to fit the facts of the Bible to their preconceived theories. This has required a great deal of stretching and twisting and lopping off here and there; the truth has been badly distorted, sometimes mutilated. The changed view of the Bible, which greatly alarms some good peo-

ple, arises from the fact that certain honest men have determined to go directly to the Bible itself and find out by studying it what manner of book it is. They have discovered that it is not precisely such a book as it has been believed to be, and the answer that they make to those who hold the old theory about it is simply this: "We cannot believe what you have told us about the Bible, because the Bible contradicts you. It is because we believe the Bible itself that we reject your theory. We believe that the Bible is an inspired book, nay, that it is by eminence *The Inspired Book*; but when you ask us 'What is an inspired book?' instead of making up a definition of inspiration out of our own heads, we only say, 'It is such a book as the Bible is,' and then we proceed to frame our definition of inspiration by the study of the Bible. Therefore, when you say that inspiration must imply infallibility, we answer, No; it does not; for here is *The Inspired Book* and it is not infallible."

In what sense the book is inspired we may be able, after a little, to see more clearly. For the present I only desire to point out the sources of the traditional doctrine of the Bible, and the sources of the new doctrine. The one is the result of the speculations of men about what the Bible must be; the other is the result of a careful and reverent study of the Bible itself.

What, then, do we find the Bible to be?

I. It is the book of righteousness. No other

book in the world fixes our thoughts so steadily upon the great interest of character. Whatever else the Bible may show us or may fail to show us, it does keep always before us the fact that the one great concern of every man is to be right in heart and in life. Righteousness tendeth to life; righteousness is salvation; Jehovah is He who loveth righteousness and hateth iniquity, and in his favor is life; these are the truths which form the very substance of this revelation. It is quite true that in the application of this principle to the affairs of every day, the early records show us much confusion and uncertainty; the definitions of righteousness which sufficed for the people of that time would not suffice for us at all; but the fact remains that the only interest of this Book in the individuals and the races which it brings before us is in their loyalty or disloyalty to that ideal of conduct which it always lifts up before us. Righteousness is life; righteousness is salvation; this is the one message of the Bible to men. There are rites and ceremonies, but these are not the principal thing; "To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" This great truth of the Bible has been but imperfectly apprehended, even among modern Christians; there is always a tendency to

make the belief in sound dogma, or the performance of decorous rites, or the experience of emotional raptures the principal thing; but the testimony of the Bible to the supremacy of character and conduct is clear and convincing, and the world is coming to understand it.

Now for any man who cares for the right, to whom character is more precious than anything else in the world, this book is worth more than any other book can be. Even the Old Testament narratives, indistinctly as they reveal the real nature of true conduct to us in this day, show us plainly the fact that nothing else in the world is to be compared with it; and the struggles and temptations of the heroes of that old book are full of instruction for us; their failures and follies and sins admonish and warn us; their steadfastness and fidelity inspire and hearten us.

II. The Bible is the record of the development of the kingdom of righteousness in the world. Man knows intuitively that he ought to do right; his notion of what is right is continually being purified and enlarged. The Bible is the record of this moral progress in the one nation of the earth to which morality has been the great concern. We have seen, clearly enough, the imperfection of the ethical standards to which the early Hebrew legislation was made to conform; we have also seen that this legislation was always a little in advance of the popular morality, leading it on to purer conceptions and better practices.

The legislation concerning divorce, the legislation regulating blood vengeance, recognizes the evils with which it deals and accommodates itself to them, but always with the purpose and the result of giving to men a larger thought and a better standard. Laws which conformed to our moral ideal would have been powerless to control such a semi-barbarous people as the Hebrews were when they came out of Egypt. The higher morality must be imparted little by little; one principle after another must be drilled into their apprehension; they could not well be learning more than one or two simple lessons at a time, and while they were learning these, other coarse and cruel and savage practices of theirs must be "winked at," as Paul says. Against any rule more strict at this early time the Hebrews would have revolted; the divine wisdom of this legislation is seen in this method which takes men as they are, and does for them the thing that is feasible, patiently leading them on and up to higher ground. If you would seize a running horse by the rein and stop him, you had better run with him for a little. This homely parable illustrates much of the Old Testament legislation which we find so defective, when judged by our standards.

It is in this larger sense that we see the signs of divinity in this old Book. It is a book of inspiration because it is the record of an inspired or divinely guided development; because the life it shows as unfolding is divine; because the goal

to which we see the people steadily conducted in its vivid chapters is the goal which God has marked for human progress; because it gives us the origin and growth of the kingdom of God in the world.

"Whence came," asks one, "and of what manner of spirit is this *anti-historic* power in Israel and the Bible? Some inner principle of development struggles against the outward historical environment, and will not rest until it prevails. What was it which selected Israel, and in one narrow land, while all the surrounding country was sinking, lifted man up in spite of himself? which along the course of one national history carried on a progressive development of religious life and truth, while other peoples, though taught by many wise men and seers, and not without their truths, still can show no one connected and progressive revelation like this?"<sup>1</sup>

What is the power that has wrought all this but the divine Power? If you ask for a proof of the existence of God, I point you to the life of the Jewish people as the Bible records it. *That history is the revelation of God.* In the record of this nation's life, in its privileges and its vicissitudes, its captivities and its restorations, its blessings and its chastenings, its institutions and its laws, its teachers and its legislators, its seers and its lawgivers, in all the forces that combine to make up the great movement of the national

<sup>1</sup> *Old Faiths in New Light*, p. 81.

life, I see God present all the while, shaping the ends of this nation, no matter how perversely it may rough-hew them, till at last it stands on an elevation far above the other nations, breathing a better atmosphere, thinking worthier and more spiritual thoughts of God, obeying a far purer moral law, holding fast a nobler ideal of righteousness,—polytheism gradually and finally rooted out of the national consciousness; the family established and honored as in no other nation; woman lifted up to a dignity and purity known nowhere else in the world; the Sabbath of rest sanctified; the principles of the decalogue fastened in the convictions of the people, the sure foundations laid of the kingdom of God in the world.

We are quite too apt unduly to disparage Judaism. Doubtless the formalism that our Lord found in it needed rebuke; its worship and its morality were yet far away from the ideal when Jesus came to earth; nevertheless, compared with all the peoples round about them even then—compared with classic Greeks and noble Romans—the ethical and spiritual development of the Jews had reached a higher stage. It is not extravagant to claim for this race the moral leadership of the world. Hear Ernest Renan, no champion of orthodoxy, as you know: "I am eager, gentlemen,"—I quote from a lecture of his on "The Share of the Semitic People in the History of Civilization,"—"to come at the prime scr-

vice which the Semitic race has rendered to the world; its peculiar work, its providential mission, if I may so express myself. We owe to the Semitic race neither political life, art, poetry, philosophy, nor science. *We owe to them religion.* The whole world—we except India, China, Japan, and tribes altogether savage—*has adopted the Semitic religions.*" Speaking then of the gradual decay of the various pagan faiths of the Aryan races, Renan continues: "It is precisely at this epoch that the civilized world finds itself face to face with the Jewish faith. Based upon the clear and simple dogma of the divine unity, discarding naturalism and pantheism by the marvelously terse phrase, 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,' possessing a law, a book, the depository of grand moral precepts and of an elevated religious poetry, Judaism had an incontestable superiority, and it might have been foreseen then that some day the world would become Jewish, that is to say, would forsake the old mythology for monotheism."<sup>1</sup>

Here is the testimony of a man who can be suspected of no undue leanings toward the religion of the Bible, to the fact that the world is indebted for its great thoughts of religion to the Semitic races, and chiefly to the Hebrew race; that the religion of Judaism, brought into comparison with the other religions, is incontestably superior. Now any man who believes in religion

<sup>1</sup> *Religious History and Criticism*, pp. 159, 160.

and in God must believe that the people to whom such a task was committed must have been trained by God to perform it. The history of this nation will then be the history of this training. That is exactly what the Old Testament is. No disputes over the nature of inspiration must be suffered to obscure this great fact. The Old Testament Scriptures do contain in biography and history, in statute and story and song and sermon, the records of the life of the nation to which God at sundry times and in divers manners was revealing himself; which he was preparing to be the bearer of the torch of his own truth into all the world. And now I ask whether anybody needs to be told that these records are precious, precious above all price? Are there any authentic portions of them that any man can afford to despise? Is not every step in the progress of this people out of savagery into a spiritual faith, matter of the profoundest interest to every human soul? Even the dullness and ignorance and crudity of this people,—even the crookedness and blindness of their leaders and teachers, are full of instruction for us; they show us with what materials and what instruments the divine wisdom and patience wrought out this great result. What other book is there that can compare in value with this book, which tells us the way of God with the people whom he chose, as Renan declares, to teach the world religion? And when one has firmly grasped



this great fact, that the Bible contains the history of the religious development of the Jewish people under providential care and tuition, how little is he troubled by the small difficulties which grow out of theories of inspiration! "We can listen," says Dr. Newman Smyth, "with incurious complacency while small disputants discuss vehemently the story of the ark or Jonah's strange adventure. . . . After all the work of the critics, the Bible still remains, the great, sublime, enduring work of the Eternal who loves righteousness and hates iniquity."<sup>1</sup>

But what have I been vindicating? The Bible? Nay, I have carefully restricted my argument to the Old Testament. It is in behalf of the Old Testament writings alone that I have sought to establish this exalted claim. What I have shown you is only the pedestal on which the beauty and strength of the Bible rests, the enduring portals which open into the glory that excelleth. The Old Testament shows us the progressive revelation of God to the Jewish people; the New Testament gives us the consummation of that work, the perfect flower of that growth of centuries. After shadows and hints and refracted lights of prophecy, breaks at last upon the world the Light that lighteth every man! When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son. It was for this that the age-long discipline of this people had been preparing them. True, "He came to

<sup>1</sup> *Old Faiths in New Light*, pp. 60, 61.

his own, and they received him not," but where else in the world would the seed of his kingdom have found any lodgment at all? The multitude rejected him, but there was a remnant who did receive him, and to whom he gave power to become the sons of God. So the word of God, that had been painfully and dimly communicated to the ancient people in laws and ordinances and prophecies, in providential mercies and chastenings, in lives of saints and prophets and martyrs, was now made flesh, and dwelt among men full of grace and truth, and they beheld his glory.

It is here that we find the real meaning of the Bible. "The end," as Canon Mozley has so strongly shown, "is the test of a progressive revelation." Jesus Christ, who is himself the Word, toward whom these laws and prophecies point, and in whom they culminate, is indeed the perfect Revelation of God. From his judgment there is no appeal; at his feet the wisest of us must sit and learn the way of life. With his words all these old Scriptures must be compared; so far as they agree with his teachings we may take them as eternal truth; those portions of them which fall below this standard, we may pass by as a partial revelation upon us no longer binding. He himself has given us, in the Sermon on the Mount, the method by which we are to test the older Scriptures. When we refuse to apply his method and go on to declare every portion of those old records authoritative, we are not

honoring him. The mischief and bane of the traditional theory is that it equalizes things which are utterly unlike. When it says that "all the books of the Scripture are equally inspired; all alike are infallible in what they teach," it puts the Gospels on the same level with Deuteronomy and Ecclesiastes and Esther. The effect of this is not to lift the latter up, but to drag the former down. They are not on the same level; it is treason to our Master Christ to say that they are alike; the one is as much higher than the other as the heavens are higher than the earth.

It is here, then, in the simple veracious records that bring before us the life of Christ, that we have the very Word of God. Whatever else the four Gospels may or may not be, they certainly do contain the story of the Life that has been for many centuries the light and the hope of the world. It is the same unique Person who stands before us in every one of these narratives, —

"So meek, forgiving, godlike, high,  
So glorious in humility."

What fault has criticism to find with this Life? What word or deed is here ascribed to him that is not worthy of him, that is not like him? Is it any wonder to us when we read this record through, that the guileless Nathanael cried out as he communed with him, "Rabbi, thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of Israel."

If, then, the New Testament gives us the artless record of the life and words of this divine

Person, the Son of God and the Saviour of the world; if it brings Him before us and manifests to us, so far as words can do it, his power and his glory; if it shows us how, by bearing witness to the truth in his life and in his death, he established in the world the kingdom which for long ages had been preparing; if it makes known to us the messages he brought of pardon and salvation; if it gives us the record of the planting and training of his church in the early ages, is there any need that I should go about to praise and magnify its worth to the children of men? If light is worth anything to those who sit in darkness, or hope to those who are oppressed with tormenting doubt; if wisdom is to be desired by those who are in perplexity, and comfort by those who are in trouble, and peace by those whose hearts are full of strife, and forgiveness by those who bear the burden of sin; if strength is a good gift to the weak, and rest to the weary, and heaven to the dying, and the eternal life of God to the fainting soul of man, then the book that tells us of Jesus Christ and his salvation is not to be compared with any other book on earth for preciousness; it is the one book that every one of us ought to know by heart.

The value of the Bible, the greatness of the Bible, are in this Life that it discloses to us. "It is upon Jesus," says a modern rationalist, "that the whole Bible turns. In this lies the value, not only of the New Testament, a great part of

which refers to him directly, but of the Old Testament as well." Rationalist though he is, no man could have stated the truth more clearly. "It is upon Jesus that the whole Bible turns." The Old Testament shows us the way preparing by which the swift feet of the messengers approach that tell us of his coming; the New Testament lifts the veil and bids us, Behold the man! The Bible is of value to us, just in proportion as it helps us to see him, to know him, to trust him. You may have a cast-iron theory of inspiration with every joint riveted; you may believe in the infallible accuracy of every vowel point and every punctuation mark; but if the Bible does not bring you into a vital union with Jesus Christ, so that you have his mind and follow in his footsteps, it profiteth you nothing. And if, by your study of it, you are brought into this saving fellowship, your theories of inspiration will take care of themselves.

I fear that we do not always comprehend the fact that it is this divine Life shining out of its pages that makes the Bible glorious. We strain our eyes so much in verifying commas, and in trying to prove that the dot of a certain i is not a fly-speck, that we fail to get much impression of the meaning or the beauty of the Saviour's life. See those two critics, with their eyes close to the wonderful "Ecce Homo" of Correggio, disputing whether there is or is not a visible stitch in the garment of Christ that ought to be seam-

less. How red their faces; how hot their words! Stand back a little, brothers! look away, for a moment, from the garment's seam; let the infinite pain and the infinite pity and the infinite yearning of that Face dawn on you for a moment, and you will cease your quarreling. So, not seldom, do the idolaters of the letter wholly miss the meaning of the sacred book, and remain in mournful ignorance of him who himself is the Word.

There are those to whom the view of the Bible presented in these chapters seems not only inadequate but destructive. "If the Bible is not infallible," they say, "it is no more than any other book; we have no further use for it." In one of the leading church reviews I find these words, the joint utterance of two eminent American theologians: "A proved error in Scripture contradicts not only our doctrine but the Scripture's claims, and therefore its inspiration in making those claims."<sup>1</sup> A proved error in Scripture stamps the book as fraudulent and worthless! Worthless it is then! Proved errors there are, scores of them. It is fatuity, it is imbecility, to deny it. And every man who can find an error in these old writings has the warrant of these teachers for throwing the book away. Tens of thousands of ingenuous and fair-minded men have taken the word of such teachers, and have thrown the book away. May God forgive the folly of these blind guides!

<sup>1</sup> *Presbyterian Review*, vol. ii. p. 245.

But what stupid reasoning is this! "If the Bible is not infallible, it is worthless." Your watch is not infallible; is it therefore worthless? Your physician is not infallible; are his services therefore worthless? Your father is not infallible; are his counsels worthless? Will you say that the moment you discover in him an error concerning any subject in heaven or on earth, that moment you will refuse to listen to his counsel? The church of God is not infallible, and never was, whatever infatuated ecclesiastics may have claimed for it; are its solemn services and its inspiring labors and its uplifting fellowships worthless?

"A ship on a lee shore," says one, "in the midst of a driving storm, throws up signal rockets or fires a gun for a pilot. A white sail emerges from the mist; it is the pilot boat. A man climbs on board, and the captain gives to him the command of the ship. All his orders are obeyed implicitly. The ship, laden with a precious cargo and hundreds of human lives, is confided to a rough-looking man whom no one ever saw before, who is to guide them through a narrow channel, where to vary a few fathoms to the right or left will be utter destruction. The pilot is invested with absolute authority as regards bringing the vessel into port."<sup>1</sup> Is this because the man is infallible, because he has

<sup>1</sup> *Orthodoxy; its Truths and Errors*, by James Freeman Clarke, p. 114.

never been detected in holding an erroneous opinion? Doubtless any of these intelligent passengers could find out, by half an hour's conversation with him, that his mind was full of crass ignorance and misconception. And nobody supposes that he is infallible, even as a pilot. He may make a mistake. What then? Will these passengers gather around the captain, and demand that he be ordered down from the bridge and thrown overboard if he disobeys? Will they say, "A pilot who is not on all subjects infallible is one whom we will not trust?" No; they believe him to be, not omniscient, but competent and trustworthy, and a great burden is lifted from their hearts when they see him take command of the ship. On all other subjects besides religion, people are able to exercise their common sense; why can they not use a modicum of the same common sense when they come to deal with religious truth?

It is not true, as a matter of fact, that the Bible no longer has any value for those who have ceased to hold the traditional view of it. Not seldom, indeed, those who have been compelled by overwhelming evidence to relinquish the traditional view have been driven by the natural reaction against it to undervalue the Bible, and even to treat it with contempt and bitterness; but even some of these have come back to it again and have found in it, when they studied it with open mind, more truth than they ever be-

fore had known. Let me cite an extreme case. I could take you to a society of free-thinkers, consisting of people who have long been outspoken in their rejection of all the doctrines of historical Christianity, many of whom formerly flouted the Bible as a book of fables, but who are now studying it diligently week by week, in the most sympathetic spirit. They do not now accept its supernaturalism; but they believe that as a manual of conduct, as a guide to life, it excels all other books. The young people of their Sunday-school are told that the Bible is not like other books; that the men who wrote it knew more about the human soul and its struggles and its aspirations after good than any other men who ever lived; and they are besought to attend, most carefully, to the lessons of life which this ancient book teaches. I should like to take some of our ultra orthodox friends, who are pettishly crying out that the Bible, if not infallible, is good for nothing, and set them down for a Sunday or two in the midst of this free-thinking Sunday-school; they might learn some things about its value that they never knew before.

This incident ought to be of service, also, to those who, having discovered that the Bible contains human elements, have rushed to the conclusion that it is no more than any other book, and who, although they do not cast it from them, hold it off, at arm's length, as it were, and maintain toward it an attitude of critical superiority.

Even these free-thinkers treat it more fairly. They are learning to approach it with open mind; they sit down before it with reverent expectancy. The Bible has a right to this sympathetic treatment. It is not just like other books. Do not take my word for this; listen rather to the testimony of one who was known, while he was alive, as the arch-heretic of New England:—

"This collection of books has taken such a hold on the world as no other. The literature of Greece, which goes up like incense from that land of temples and heroic deeds, has not half the influence of this book, from a nation alike despised in ancient and in modern times. It is read of a Sabbath in all the ten thousand pulpits of our land. In all the temples of religion is its voice lifted up week by week. The sun never sets on its gleaming page. It goes equally to the cottage of the plain man and the palace of the king. It is woven into the literature of the scholar, and colors the talk of the street. The bark of the merchant cannot sail the sea without it; no ships of war go to the conflict, but the Bible is there. It enters men's closets; mingles in all their grief and cheerfulness of life. The affianced maiden prays God in Scripture for strength in her new duties; men are married by Scripture. The Bible attends them in their sickness, when the fever of the world is on them. The aching head finds a softer pillow when the Bible lies underneath. The mariner escaping

from shipwreck clutches this first of his treasures and keeps it sacred to God. It goes with the peddler in his crowded pack; cheers him at eventide when he sits down dusty and fatigued; brightens the freshness of his morning face. It blesses us when we are born, gives names to half Christendom; rejoices with us; has sympathy for our mourning; tempers our grief to finer issues. It is the better part of our sermons. It lifts man above himself; our best of uttered prayers are in its storied speech, wherewith our fathers and the patriarchs prayed. The timid man, about awaking from this dream of life, looks through the glass of Scripture and his eye grows bright; he does not fear to stand alone, to tread the way unknown and distant, to take the death angel by the hand and bid farewell to wife and babes and home. Men rest on this their dearest hopes; it tells them of God and of his blessed Son, of earthly duties and of heavenly rest."<sup>1</sup>

This is not mere rhetoric; it is simplest truth of human experience. How is it possible for any man to treat this book just as he would any other book? He ought to come to its perusal with the expectation of finding in it wisdom and light and life. He must not stultify his reason and stifle his moral sense when he reads it; he must keep his mind awake and his conscience active; but there is treasure here if he will search for it; search he must, yet the only right attitude before

<sup>1</sup> Theodore Parker, *Discourses on Religion*.

it is one of reverence and trust. Any man of ripe wisdom and high character, who has been known to you all your life, whose judgment you have verified, whose goodness you have witnessed and experienced, commands your respectful attention the moment he begins to speak. You do not believe him to be infallible, but you listen to what he says with trustfulness; you expect to find it true. To say that you listen to him as you do to every other man is not the fact; the posture of your mind in his presence is different from that in which you stand before most other men. It ought to be. He has gained, by his probity, the power to speak to you with authority. The Bible has gained the same power. You do not use it fairly when you use it as you do every other book.

There is the nation's flag proudly flying from the summit of the Capitol. It may be a banner that was borne upon the battlefield, decorated now with well-mended rents, and with stains of carnage. "Behold it!" cries the idolater. "It is absolutely faultless in perfection and beauty! There is not a blemish on its folds, there is not an imperfection in its web; every thread in warp and woof is flawless; every seam is absolutely straight; every star is geometrically accurate; every proportion is exact; the man who denies it is a traitor!"

"Absurd!" replies the iconoclast. "See the holes and the stains; there is not one straight

seam ; there is not a star that is in perfect form ; ravel it, and you will find no thread in warp or woof that is flawless ; nay, you may even discover shreds of shoddy mixed with the fine fibre. Your flag is nothing more than any other old piece of bunting, and if you think it is, you are a fool."

Nay, good friends, you are both wrong. The blemishes are there ; it would be fanaticism to deny them ; and he who says that no man can be loyal to the nation who will not profess that this banner is immaculate is setting up a fantastic standard of patriotism. But, on the other hand, this flag is something more than any other old piece of bunting, and he who thinks it something more is not a fool. It is the symbol of liberty ; it is the emblem of sovereignty ; it is the pledge of protection ; it is the sign and guarantee of justice and order and peace. What memories cluster round it, of dauntless heroism, and holy sacrifice, and noble consecration ! What hopes are gleaming from its stars and fluttering in its shining folds — hopes of a day when wars shall be no more and all mankind shall be one brotherhood ! The man to whom the flag of his country is no more than any other piece of weather-beaten bunting is a man without a country.

Is not my parable already interpreted ? Are not the idolaters who make it treason to disbelieve a single word of the Bible, and the iconoclasts who treat it as nothing better than any

other book, equally far from the truth ? Is it not the part of wisdom to use the book rationally, but reverently ; to refrain from worshiping the letter, but to rejoice in the gifts of the Spirit which it proffers ? The same divine influence which illumines and sanctifies its pages is waiting to enlighten our minds that we may comprehend its words, and to prepare our hearts that we may receive its messages. Some things hard to understand are here, but the Spirit of truth can make plain to us all that we need to know. No man wisely opens the book who does not first lift up his heart for help to find in it the way of life, and to him who studies it in this spirit it will show the salvation of God

