

“God’s Providence towards the Bible.”

ADDRESS

Delivered by B. M. Palmer, D. D., at the celebration of
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We are assembled Christian friends, by invitation extended from the various pulpits throughout the city this morning, to commemorate the Thirty-first Anniversary of the Southwestern Bible Society—a local organization with a restricted territory, over which it undertakes to circulate the sacred Scriptures. It is, however, only one of the many co-ordinate associations scattered throughout Christendom engaged in the same benevolent enterprise; and they are all of them more or less closely connected with the American Bible Society in this country, and with the British and Foreign Bible Society in England; whose object is to print the sacred Scriptures in all the languages and dialects of the earth, and to scatter these “leaves of the tree of life which are for the healing of the nations” wherever sin has extended its ravages.

We are confronted then just here with a momentous fact, the import of which it may be well for us to consider. Why is it that this one book, lying by itself on that desk, commands such universal homage? What is it that justifies the pre-eminent title in which it claims to be THE BOOK? The world is full of books, and the shelves in our public and private libraries groan beneath their weight. The eye swims, and the mind stag-

gers, in simply contemplating the ponderous tomes which are gathered in these repositories of learning. Yet this one book claims supremacy over them all; as though no other could fall into the same denomination with itself and be called a book, when it is near. Again, with our hand upon the several treatises of which it is composed, we speak of "THE SCRIPTURES." Why, the pen is in every man's hand—we all write, and the world is full of writings. But these are THE WRITINGS, sitting in judgment upon all other writings, and claiming a royal jurisdiction wherever books and writings are found upon earth.

How shall this proud supremacy of the Bible be vindicated? The answer is at hand; it has but one author, and that author is God. He who built the Universe and created all things that exist, has revealed His perfections and his will in the pages of this book. The book is therefore one, and stands alone in the same awful supremacy with Him who is its author. It is true that human agency was employed, through a period of fifteen hundred years, in composing the separate portions of the collective volume. Divine truth was cast in the mould of human thought, and was transmitted through the forms of human speech. So distinct indeed are the characteristics of each individual penman, and so marked is the impress of each particular epoch, that a just historic criticism is furnished with the evidence upon which to establish the authenticity and genuineness of every part of the sacred canon. But in all these contributions, made piece by piece through the lapse of centuries, there is a unity of thought and design which marks the presidency of a single mind throughout. That mind was the mind of God—embodying His truth under human conceptions which shall rightly embrace it, and under

modes of utterance which shall as safely express it. "Holy men of God spake"—here is the human element in the Scriptures; but they "spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost," and there is the Divine element which gives the Divine authorship of the entire record.

May I venture to spread before you a wonderful parallelism which occurs to me at this moment? "There is one God, and there is none other but He," "infinite, eternal and unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth"—and these attributes of necessity exclude the possibility of any other to whom they can be ascribed. There can be but one Infinite and Supreme; and the moment we grant these perfections to Him, every competitor or rival is shut out from our thought. Again, as there is one God, so there is one law—a law consisting not of arbitrary enactments, but springing from the nature of Him whose character and perfections it accurately transcribes. It is the universal law of the one Supreme Jehovah, spreading its authority over all orders of created intelligence in all worlds, only modified in its details to suit the varying conditions in which these are found in heaven, earth or hell. Again, as there is one God and one law, so there is but one Mediator who undertakes to solve the mighty problem of sin—one Sacrifice, by which to make atonement for transgression—one Priest, to offer that sacrifice upon the altar—and one Advocate, to plead in the chancery of heaven the high argument of His own sufferings and death. A single link is needed to complete the chain; one God, one Law, one Redeemer, one sacrifice and one Book, in which to make the stupendous revelation of it all to us. There it lies before us, the Book of books; springing immediately from the mind of God,

revealing to us the thoughts of God, unfolding to us the plans of God, making known to us the purpose of God in the creation of the universe, and disclosing to us the grand secrets of the eternal world. It deserves the applause of royalty with which it is crowned, invested with the supremacy which is the prerogative of its Divine author.

In view of all this there arises a question which I propose for solution. If the Bible be the Book of God, claiming jurisdiction over all other writings, is it not to be expected that God's providence shall be conspicuously concerned about its history? I desire, to-night, to point out some of the forms in which this providential intervention and care may be distinctly traced.

1. First then, I direct attention to *some facts connected with the two languages in which the Old and the New Testaments were originally written*. It is obvious that, in a Revelation which is intended to unfold a plan of salvation to guilty men, terms must be employed which shall denote general conceptions, such as those of holiness, sin, redemption, repentance, forgiveness, regeneration and the like. But these purely abstract terms are devoid of significance, until a meaning is put into them by taking up the language of sense—perception and glorifying it with a spiritual import. As ideas are originated in the mind through impressions made upon the senses, the whole terminology of Grace must be created by the transfiguration of images which are drawn from the outward world. Hence the symbolical character of Divine Revelation in the Old Testament. The doctrine of atonement was taught by the institution of animal sacrifice, at the very beginning and instantly upon the first transgression; and this germinal symbol expands afterwards into the whole complex ritual of the ancient Hebrews. Conviction of sin

and the consequent obligation to punishment, were deepened in the mind by innumerable ceremonial restrictions; which were constantly violated in the intercourse of life, and which required a constant purgation of the transgressor. The expiation of sin demanded by infinite and inflexible justice, was adumbrated in the various sacrifices offered upon the Jewish altar; and reconciliation and communion with the Most High were illustrated in the sacrificial feasts, which formed so important a feature in Hebrew worship. The holiness of God and the corresponding purity of the worshiper were represented under the ablutions and purifications, which transfigured the idea of physical into that of moral cleanness, and laid the foundation of the whole doctrine of sanctification. It is needless to adduce further illustrations of the pictorial and typical character of that ancient economy—one of its important ends being the creation of a language, through which the Holy Ghost shall reveal to us the mysteries of God's mercy and grace. Those who desire to pursue this line of thought, will do well to consult a popular work in which it is elaborated with admirable skill.*

Now the Hebrew tongue is peculiarly fitted for this symbolical presentation of Divine truth. As one at least of the primitive languages, every word in it embodies a material image and offers a picture to the eye. The scholar is delighted to find in its vocabulary what appears to him a splendid gallery of art, upon whose walls are hung the most beautiful paintings the eye ever rested upon. Into the tapestry of the language are woven forms of exquisite grace, as well as landscapes of surpassing loveliness. Perhaps it is true of every language in its primordial construction, that

*Walker's "Philosophy of the plan of salvation."

every word shall be thus pictorial ; but in the development which culture always ensures, this emblematic character is gradually lost ; as words pass from their primary use into a secondary and tropical signification. What is gained in the accession of general and abstract terms necessary to philosophic precision, is lost in poetic beauty and force. But the Hebrew language was employed as the vehicle of Divine Revelation, whilst it was in its forming stage, and the painting of the material image was hardly as yet dry upon the surface of each word. It was in itself a collection of symbols, exactly suited to the symbolic revelation of which it was made the medium of transmission. It was equally adapted to those grand visions afforded to the ancient Prophets, through whose inspired enigmas the shadows of events yet to come were cast upon the wall. Nor was it less fitted to be the language of devotion and of praise, in those tender lyrics set to the harp of David ; and which will be set to the harp of every saint in every age, until they swell into the grand chorus of angels and the redeemed around the throne of God and the Lamb in Heaven.

I turn now from the Hebrew of the Old Testament to the Greek of the New. When "the fulness of time was come," and the Great Prophet appeared upon earth of whom Moses was the type, another language was required for the larger Revelation to be made—a language more developed than the Hebrew, more comprehensive and flexible, and more subtle in expressing the nicest shades of thought. So God, in His providence, far back in the centuries, was training the Greeks to frame a language for the New Testament, as before the Hebrews had prepared a dialect for the Old. They were a people remarkable for subtlety of intellect, carrying the culture of art and the

study of philosophy to such a pitch as to win for their country the proud distinction of being "the school-mistress of the world." But the grandest monument of their genius is the language which they forged in those high speculations of philosophy which yet rule so largely the empire of modern thought. In the construction of this language they have rendered their largest service to mankind; for into it God has poured all the treasures of that truth in which the symbols of the Old Economy were lost, as the shadow is swallowed up in the substance, It was exactly the language in which to embalm the materials of a scientific theology. In the fulness of its vocabulary, in the variety of its connective particles, in the richness of its grammatical forms, and above all in its power of combining words as thought wrestles in its agony to find emphasis of expression, truth is stated with such nicety of discrimination and with such delicacy of shade as to signalize the Greek for the conveyence of Christian dogma. The Biblical student, after worrying through elaborate commentaries, often recurs to the original text, surprised to find in itself the best exposition of its own meaning. And who does not know that, in the great controversies through which the creed of the Church was articulately framed in the early centuries, it was the precision of the Greek tongue which enabled the Christian Fathers to detect error, sometimes impaling it upon the shaft of a single letter in a single word.

But if the Divine care is disclosed in thus preparing the languages for the reception of His truth, there is deeper significance in the fact that both were broken from the chain of living tongues as soon as they had fulfilled this purpose. Both the Hebrew and the Greek, after gathering into them the Divine testimonies, were sealed up as the urns in which those

treasures should be preserved from change through all time. The Hebrew was arrested in its growth, so that it never passed through the stages of development necessary to bring it to perfection. I shall never forget the impression of this incompleteness made upon me when I first entered upon the study of that venerable tongue—nor my wonder that our educators had not embraced it in the curriculum by which our youth are trained, as illustrating how languages are formed and grow in exact accordance with all the laws of thought. This arrest was made under a series of providential dispensations carefully interpreted to us by the prophet standing always close to the historian, and which are so wonderful in character that they are read by us with tingling ears after the lapse of more than twenty centuries. Certain it is, that upon the completion of the Old Testament Canon, the Hebrew passed into a sacred dialect, no longer used in ordinary intercourse, free from the fluctuations to which every living tongue is exposed, and consecrated to the one high purpose of preserving in its ark the solemn symbols of a prophetic and typical economy.

The same great change passed upon the Greek tongue, though less abruptly than upon the more ancient Hebrew. But when it had fulfilled its mission, first in receiving into its verbal forms the mighty mysteries of redeeming Grace, and then in defining amidst fierce controversies the creed of the church, it too became a fixed, hard crystal, protecting from abrasion the precious treasure of Divine Revelation which it enshrined.

The insignificance of this fact needs but a word of comment. All living languages are in a perpetual flux. Words lose their original meaning, becoming often ambiguous, sometimes obsolete, and in a few in-

stances expressing the exact opposite of its first import. Why, at the end of three centuries we are unable to read Chaucer and Spencer without the aid of a glossary. The modern reader is perplexed in deciphering the early versions of Wiclif and Tyndale. Since the period of the Reformation different versions of the English Bible have been made; and the scholarship of the English speaking world is at this moment engaged in another and more careful revision, with a view to the expurgation of archaisms and conforming our existing version more nearly to the present state of the English language. Let us suppose then that the Hebrew tongue had been subjected to this law of change through a stretch of twenty-three hundred years since the days of Malachi—and the Greek, through nearly eighteen hundred years since the days of John—where would be the standard text to which we could recur to ascertain the Revelation which God had given to man?

There is another aspect of this same matter. We have reached the period in the history of the church when her great duty is to unfetter these Divine Oracles, In this Missionary age, when the church has harnessed herself to the imperial task of subjugating the world to Christ, these Scriptures must be translated into all the tongues and dialects of tongues which are spoken over the globe. In China and Japan, in Egypt and India, all over the steppes of Asia and through the jungles of Africa, men must read "in their own tongue wherein they were born" the wonderful works of God. But what shall be the standard by which all these versions shall be verified, and what the text from which they shall severally be drawn?

Obviously there can be no final and uniform arbiter, except in a Revelation which has been locked

up in a language itself congealed into a fixed form and put forever beyond the reach of change. How marvellous the working of that Providence, by which the unchangeable God has stamped the likeness of His own unchangeableness upon the Record of His own purposes and thoughts! Men may deny or refuse, or misconstrue His testimony; but they cannot add to it, nor take from it. God has locked up the Record in the archives of His own providing, and has taken the key into His own possession.

2. I call attention next to *the providential multiplication and preservation of ancient manuscripts*, by which we are able to-day to establish the verity of the Sacred Text. The topic is large, and can only be handled here under its most general aspect. Of course the question presents itself upon taking up a copy of the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures, have we here the very words which the Holy Ghost inspired Prophets and Apostles to write? It so happens that early copies of the Sacred Record were made with evident care, and were collected at important ecclesiastical centres—such as Alexandria in Egypt, Constantinople and Rome in Europe, in Babylonia and Syria in Asia. With untiring industry these have been collated by the ripest scholars of every age, and through this comparison and combination of testimony the verity of the original text can be satisfactorily ascertained. It will serve to illustrate this point to refer to a single fact. When Kennicott and DeRossi first announced their detection of many thousand various readings in the manuscripts they had compared, the Christian world rose in alarm against critical labors which threatened to unsettle the authority of God's word. But when these variations came to be sifted, they were found almost uniformly of the most unimportant character—such, for example, as

whether we should spell the word honour in English with or without the letter u. With the exception of only one or two single passages, the genuineness of the received text was unchallenged; and not a single doctrine or fact was displaced, or even weakened, by this imposing array of seeming contradictions. The integrity of the Sacred Text was thus unchangeably established; and these manuscripts remain and will be kept with holy vigilance, as permanent vouchers of the integrity of the Scriptures in our hands to-day. How marvellous is that Providence which caused so many copies of the Divine word to be taken at so many points, and at a period when fraud and interpolation, or simple errors of transcription, would certainly be detected! And how remarkable, that so many of these witnessing manuscripts should have escaped the ravages of time and the changes to which all things mortal are exposed! How wonderful that historic criticism finds the evidence for establishing the genuineness of the Scriptures increasing with every new discovery! All this becomes the more impressive by the contrast between the Sacred Books, and those of secular literature which have come down to us from ancient days. No such cumulative testimony can be drawn from concurrent documents to establish the genuineness of any profane history; showing that God, having given the Revelation of His will, has also taken care that it should be preserved and verified to all the generations that shall live to the judgment day.

3. I pass to another striking verification of the Divine Record, which has come to light in recent times; *the antiquarian researches into the remains of ancient profane history contemporaneous with the events recorded in the Bible.* You need not be told that the dogmatic authority of the Scriptures is now assailed with

greater persistency and boldness than in any former age. The old line of assault through alleged discrepancies found in the historic statements of the Bible, has been abandoned; as minute investigation has, one by one, cleared these up and shown them to exist in appearance only, but not in fact. And the blatant lecturer, who in this country is now employed in giving a rehash of the blasphemies of Paine and the puerilities of the elder Tindal, may be safely ignored as being himself simply an anachronism. But the modern school of criticism has undertaken the more audacious task of unsettling the authorship of the more ancient portions of the Sacred Record and the dates of their composition, inducing a general skepticism as to the historical verity of the entire book.

Well then, side by side with this school of destructive criticism and yet wholly independent of it, a spirit of antiquarian research has been awakened; which undertakes a thorough exploration of those ancient Biblical lands, to see what knowledge can be gleaned from the historic monuments lying buried under the ruins of those ancient cities which were once the seat of empire. Archæological societies have been organized in America and in Europe, raising large sums of money to be employed in this exhumation of ancient and forgotten history. The best scholars of the world have been sent forth under their auspices, equipped with all the appliances necessary to this work of excavation. It would be an old story to many in this audience to tell how they have invaded the tombs of Egypt, scanned the walls of her temples, and deciphered the hieroglyphics of her obelisks—how they have scoured the plains of Moab and gathered the legend upon her wonderful stone—how they have dug beneath the site of ancient Troy, to find the relics of Homeric story—how they have turned up to the light of the sun

the old foundations of Nineveh, Persepolis and Babylons, tussling with the cunei form inscriptions of the burnt bricks disinterred from the debris of those hoary centres of a past civilization. But the result of all this subterranean exploration, as published under the sanction of those learned, archæologists, is what particularly interests us to-night. These inscriptions are found to be monumental testimonies of the prowess of ancient warriors and kings. They tell of such and such a campaign, in a given year, conducted by such and such a monarch—of the invasion and subjugation of this and that foreign territory—of the siege and sack of cities whose names are particularly recited—of conquered kings led in chains as tributary vassals behind triumphal chariots—and all this accompanied with magniloquent praises of the might and glory of the conqueror. But all these proud narrations are found to fall into the Bible record as in a natural socket. The story is simply supplementary of what was long ago written upon the sacred page. The hiatus designedly left open here and there by the inspired historian, who was writing only the facts which related to God's dealings with His chosen people, is more or less perfectly filled with these scraps of profane history gathered from these monumental stones and bricks. So far as they have been yet deciphered, not a solitary contradiction has emerged to what is written as history in the Bible. On the contrary, the correspondence is so exact between the two independent records, the later facts so interlacing with the earlier, that we have that precise verification of Biblical history which springs from the undesigned coincidence of minute particulars. This complimentary character of the monumental history confirms the testimony of the written word beyond the chance of further impeachment.

It should be stated in this connexion that these researches have made no substantive addition to the sum of our knowledge of the past. They have in some degree rounded out the knowledge we had before, by filling up the gaps which existed in the previous record; but they have added no chapters to history which are positively fresh and new. Intrinsically valuable as enlarging and confirming what was already known, so far as I am aware, the sum total of history remains without increase of bulk. This leaves us to infer not only that we have in the inspired volume the key to all past history, but that God has treasured in His book the cream of all the facts which were worth preserving and transmitting. And it is well suited to provoke admiration, that the disclosure of all this confirmatory testimony should be reserved to the period when it was most wanted to meet the most formidable assault ever made upon the historical verity of the sacred Scriptures.

4. I beg leave to submit to your consideration another Providential movement in favor of the Bible, which strikes me as not a little remarkable. I refer to *the concerted effort which is now being made to convert the Sabbath School into a regular Biblical Institute.* The Scriptures are exposed in our day to every kind of assault, and not the least formidable is that which comes from a certain school of science. Believing that no contradiction can exist between what God teaches in nature and what He teaches through a special Revelation, I restrict the censure to a particular class; and would think it equally rash and unjust to impute to science, which can teach only truth, theories which simply lead us back to the antiquated and abandoned errors of the past. There are those however, by no means deficient in genius, influence or zeal, who upon the ground of science openly impugn the authority of the Bible. They

allege that an honest rendering of the sacred text yields an account of the derivation and government of the world which is contrary to fact. In the place of an intelligent Creator whose efficient will brings into being a well ordered Universe, they postulate a primordial vapor—whether itself original or derived, will depend upon the thinker's tendency to Atheism on the one hand, or to Pantheism on the other. In the womb of this first matter lay hidden the germs of all forms that exist, organic or inorganic—and by necessity of logic all the potencies of life, of thought and of volition. Through almost interminable ages, and under the operation of necessary mechanical laws, the whole cosmos was self-produced, and is held in the iron embrace of a rigid physical fatalism. The huge machinery grinds on under the inflexible laws through which it was first established. All freedom and responsibility are destroyed. Man thinks and feels, and chooses and acts, under the same physical necessity through which the plant grows. As God is excluded from the arrangement and order of the Universe, so is He excluded from its management and control. The wheels and pistons of the monster machine move under the law of its own mechanism, and there is no supreme intelligence to open and to shut the valves. An indwelling mechanical force drives its ponderous wheels upon the iron track; until by some explosive catastrophe the whole becomes a stupendous wreck, and all returns to chaos again to await a new mechanical evolution. In such a scheme there is no room for either Providence or Prayer. Nature runs in a fixed groove; and man with all his wants and woes finds himself "without God and without hope in the world."

It is not incumbent upon me to test here the validity of any of these speculations; which, though they are advanced only by the extreme wing of skeptical

scientists, are conclusions from which they do not shrink in their most pronounced form. The object is simply to state the issue which, in the name of what is called science, is joined with the inspired Book of God, and beneath which its dogmatic authority is thought by many to be steadily crumbling. Let the issue then be accepted by us precisely at the point it is made, and in these terms—a Divine testimony rightly interpreted, as against all the assumptions of science and all the speculations of Philosophy. But now let us see one of the ways in which God is leading us up to this issue. It occurred not long since to the mind of an earnest Christian layman, to employ the Sabbath school as the instrument of lifting up the Bible as a great classic to be systematically studied in all its parts and connexions. The suggestion, like an electric spark, flashed at once along the wires of sympathy throughout the Christian world. Almost before it was matured in the mind of its author, it was wrought into a practical and comprehensive scheme. A select committee of representatives from all the Evangelical churches marks out a curriculum of study to be completed in seven years, in which the Sabbath scholar is carried consecutively through all portions of the Book. Now the lesson is in the Old Testament, and now it is in the New—now it is in the lives of the Patriarchs, and now it is in the Gospel life of our Lord—now it is in the history of the Hebrew kings, and now it is in the Apostolic Acts—now it is in the grand utterances of the ancient Prophets, and now it is in the close reasoning of the doctrinal Epistles. Almost without hesitation the system has been adopted by all branches of the Christian church; and to-day the ripest scholarship is employed in pouring the accumulated stores of Biblical learning into the lap of the Sabbath school, which had before been treasured in Theological seminaries as a species of

esoteric and professional lore. The generations of the future will thus be trained in the knowledge of the Bible as, in itself, a complete Organon; a book of history with its testimonial facts—a book of principles with their tremendous moral sweep—a book to enlighten the reason, and to direct the conscience, and to sanctify the affections—a book, the test of character and the guide of conduct—a book, the final arbiter of all disputes, and the key to open the door of everlasting blessedness and glory. If, too, the time shall come, which I am hopeful enough to predict is not far distant, when the Sabbath school shall enlarge its circle to embrace the parents as well as the children, we shall have the entire church in training as systematic students of the Bible. There will then be no such thing as graduating from the Sabbath school, for the child of seven years will find at his side the grand parent of seventy years—all gazing intently upon the glass of the written word, until these lower forms of knowledge are superseded by the grander revelations which shall burst directly from the face of the Throne.

What then is the conclusion into which we drift from this antithesis between infidel propagandism on the one hand, and this Bible education on the other? Why only that the controversies of the age are narrowing down to the issue between a Divine testimony and all human speculations. It is true now as of old, that "the battle is not ours but God's;" and he says to us as He did to Ahab, "because the Syrians have said the Lord is God of the hills, but He is not God of the valleys, therefore will I deliver all this great multitude into their hand—and ye shall know that I am the Lord." It is fit that the Supreme Book, which gives the mind of the Supreme Jehovah, should have power behind it to enforce its testimonies upon the consciences and hearts of men. It is "not by might, nor by power,

but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." Therefore it is the church has planted herself upon the Divine word; and therefore it is we are educating our children to stand squarely upon its authority. When infidelity and skepticism marshal their forces, we are content to let the Bible speak with its own voice. The glory of victory shall belong only to Him by whom it is achieved. Let the great battle then with Gog and Magog be fought upon these holy plains, and the host of Israel exclaim "the sword of the Lord and of Gideon!"

5. I will fatigue your patience with only one illustration further of my general theme. It is found in *the division of the church into different branches, or as it is sometime invidiously termed, into different sects.* This divergence has been thrown as a reproach into the face of our Protestant Christianity, nor will I undertake to deny that it furnishes proof of human infirmity. Perhaps it is a fault that we cannot see eye to eye upon all the details of the Christian scheme. But when the vast comprehension of the system is considered, as well as the depths of mystery in which its fundamental truths are sunk—and when further we take into account the natural tendency of the human mind to divergence in the field of speculation—there is at least a diminution of the reproach. Yet if it be an evil, it has unquestionably been allowed in the Providence of God; and it may of that class which Divine wisdom sees fit to subordinate to a superior good. It cannot be denied that all bodies of Christians which stand upon the authority and teachings of the Bible, agree entirely upon all the ground facts which that book reveals, however they may diverge in their articulate expositions and deductions. Upon such fundamental truths as the unity of God, and the adorable mystery of a tri-per-

sonal distinction in that unity—upon the reality of the Incarnation, involving the two natures in the person of Jesus Christ—upon the fact of redemption accomplished through His death upon the Cross—upon the doctrine of justification before God through His perfect righteousness alone—upon the office of faith in appropriating this righteousness and making it our own—upon the truth that salvation is grounded purely in Divine Grace, independent of human merit—upon the fact of the sinner's entire estrangement from God, and his just condemnation under a perfect and holy law—upon the necessity of regeneration by the Holy Ghost, who quickens us from spiritual death into spiritual life—upon personal holiness as the necessary voucher of a regenerate state—upon the offices of the Holy Spirit in renewing, enlightening, comforting, sanctifying and glorifying the believer—upon the resurrection of the dead, and the final judgment—upon the eternal blessedness of the redeemed in Heaven, and the everlasting punishment of the wicked in Hell—upon each and upon all these supreme truths which are the ribs of the Christian system, there is not the breadth of a hair which divides the Evangelical churches of this country or of England. Why, in this rapid enumeration I have run up a magnificent creed which none upon this platform to-night would hesitate to subscribe; and yet I have stated only in part the doctrinal consensus of the catholic church of God upon earth. It is true, it would not be difficult to draw up a formidable list of topics upon which we would honestly divide. Yet this would happen only when we come to specification of the minor details of the system, or to questions of external order which do not touch the vitals of Christianity at all. Upon the system itself as it stands before us in its essential facts, we agree as with the heart and the voice of one man.

There arises then from this diversity in unity a capital advantage, that these different branches of the church become concurrent witnesses for the truth which they hold in common. There is no compulsory uniformity in their testimony. There is no collusion between the witnesses, patching up a system to be imposed upon the credulity of men. But in the free exercise of private judgment, each has bent over the sacred volume to find out its meaning for himself. That the investigation has been independent and free, is proved by their obstinate difference in given particulars; and their unanimity in affirming the truths which lie at the heart of the system, is a light shining upon the Bible such as could only be produced by the convergence of separate rays to a common focus.

Why is it that the life of our Lord is written by the four Evangelists? Could not one historian have given the substantive facts, without the apparent repetition of them by the other three? Why should Matthew, with his eye fixed upon the Jewish people, cast his narrative into a form which accumulates the testimonies to the Messiahship of Jesus? Why should Luke, with his eye fixed upon the Gentile nations, bring out in minute and expressive features the true human nature of Christ—putting him thus in sympathetic relations to the human race, and tinging his Gospel with such a Pauline color of thought? And why should John, the holy mystic of the Apostolic College, go back of all this into the pre-existence of Christ who “in the beginning was the word that was with God, and was God”—reciting those wonderful discourses which breathe the music of infinite love from the bosom of the Father? Why this four-sided history of the Redeemer on earth? I do not pretend to give an exhaustive answer to these questions, touching the manifold uses of just such a history as this. But unde-

nably there is an advantage to us in being able to go around that blessed life upon all the sides of the square, as light and shade fall upon it from north, south, east and west. May it not be in analogy with all this, that the church of God has been allowed to front all the points of the compass in the variations which have been indicated; in order that the solid temple of truth within may be recognized as one and alone by the very number of faces it is able to present?

I am warned by the clock that I must close. Christian friends, I suppose you have felt, in those tender moments which sometimes come to us in the closet, an envy of those who enjoyed the privilege of looking upon the face of our Lord on earth. You feel that if He would but reveal Himself to your sight, and if you could but once clasp his human form in your embrace, you would be able to say with Simeon in the temple "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation." And it is perhaps with a sigh breaking into a sob that you bow under Paul's solemn prohibition, "yet now henceforth know we Him no more after the flesh." Yet here is the secondary incarnation of our blessed Lord in this Book. Here are the tones of His voice; here are the words of His love; here are the tears upon His cheek for human suffering and sin. It is not to us the hard letter of a hard record, but it is a living Christ walking up and down with us in a garden of delights; a personal friend, the pulse of whose warm love we feel against our beating heart, and into whose confiding ear we can pour every pain and every prayer. What a compensation have we in place of our absent Lord! As for myself, I am content not to look upon the face of my Master upon earth. This joy, I humbly hope, is reserved for me hereafter: it is enough now if I can

meet Him in His word, and feel His strength and pity in the hours of weakness and sorrow, of temptation and of sin.

But duty is co-ordinate with privilege. An obligation rests upon those to whom the oracles of God are committed. Have we the right to monopolize the precious gift? It is God's book and God's salvation given to the world. Would you raise partition walls quite up to the body of the sun, that his blessed beams should slant only upon your dwelling? Would you fence off the expansive air, that it should fill only your lungs and not those of your neighbor? God's love is like the sunlight which bathes the earth with its glory. His grace free as the air which breathes over grass and flower, over land and sea, in the great round globe. You are asked to-night to aid in circulating these Scriptures through the section of the land in which we live, through the vast outlying territory that is beyond, throughout the earth, that all nations may be able to see "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." I am ashamed to make any appeal in behalf of what is so supreme as the Bible. One thing is certain, nothing of privilege or duty is higher than this to which you are summoned to-night. Next to the joy arising from our personal interest in Christ, is the joy of uniting with Him who is the Word in spreading God's thought throughout the world.

EXTRACT FROM THE CHARTER

OF THE

South-Western Bible Society.

ARTICLE III.

Members of the Society shall be as follows :

1. *Annual Members, being persons who shall annually contribute a sum not less than three dollars.*
2. *Life Members, being persons who shall have donated the sum of thirty dollars.*
3. *Life Directors, being persons who shall have donated the sum of one hundred and fifty dollars.*
4. *Honorary Members, being Ministers of the Gospel, whose congregations shall make an annual contribution in aid of the funds of the Society.*
5. *Patrons, being persons who shall have donated the sum of one thousand dollars.*

11.

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