

the dignity of a judge whom I ought to manifest the unquestioning docility of the disciple.

The authority of the Bible, moreover, is not merely infallible; it is supreme and exclusive. With whom does it take counsel? or what authority does it once recognize as co-ordinate, or in any way sharing the honors and prerogatives of its moral jurisdiction?—If tradition, whether oral or documentary, ecclesiastical or apostolic, aspire to this elevation, the legitimacy of its pretensions must be demonstrated by arguments similar to those which illustrate the claims of the word of Inspiration. Has this ever been done? Has it ever been seriously attempted even? What single tradition alleged by the Church of Rome to have been entrusted to her custody, has she ever traced up in the light of historical evidence to a Divine source? None, we unhesitatingly and aversely maintain; no, not one. Until this most reasonable condition is satisfied, fidelity to truth and to God forbids us to recede a hairsbreadth from the position so firmly taken and so nobly maintained by the immortal Chillingworth, **THE BIBLE, THE BIBLE, IS OUR RELIGION.**

But how stands the question as to the right of every human being to read the Bible?—For if this claim can be shown to be an unauthorized and arrogant assumption; if it be placed under interdiction by the God of the Bible; then, sir, instead of now celebrating a Jubilee, we ought in the review of what we have been doing for the last fifty years, to put on sackcloth and ashes, and prostrate ourselves in the dust of humiliation and repentance.—We have circulated the Scriptures by millions in 150 dialects. We have rendered them accessible to the larger portion of earth's population. What an inexpressible offence if God designed them to be the exclusive possession of a privileged class! The mischief is irreparable. The fire we have kindled at a thousand points can never be extinguished. It must inevitably spread, and result in a general conflagration. To be serious; instead of deprecating, we exult in the prospect of such a consummation. From that conflagration shall emerge new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.

In reply to the question, what right have the laity to read the word of God, and exercise their private judgment in its interpretation? I demand, What right has any person or priesthood to intervene betwixt me and the voice of the Almighty? to wrest from my hand the charter of my spiritual privileges; the title deed which my Father in heaven has given me, to an imperishable inheritance? Does the heavenly record itself sanction such a procedure? I open it, though with a trembling hand, to ascertain this point. My doubts instantly vanish. From every page, from every paragraph, evidence beams upon me that I am immediately addressed. Its theme is the common salvation; its own express announcement,—“Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.” Proceeding in my inquiry, I find that not only is the unrestricted reading of this blessed volume accorded as an indefeasible right of humanity, but enjoined as an imperative duty. If the book of the law was not to depart out of the mouth of a Hebrew,—if they were commanded to treasure its words in their hearts, and to teach them diligently to their children; if Timothy is commended of St. Paul, because

from a child he had known the Holy Scriptures, and the Bereans are characterised as noble-minded in that they searched the Scriptures daily, and tested even the teaching of Apostles by that Divine criterion; if, in a word, the voice of the Son of God is, *Search the Scriptures*, how fearful is the temerity, how tremendous the responsibility, of those who would take away from the people the key of knowledge!

Under what pretence, then, is a right so sacred and inviolable invaded by any hierarchy? Will it be alleged that in essential doctrines or duties of general obligation the lessons of inspiration are obscure? Obscure! Their very entrance giveth light. Doubt and darkness retire at their approach. ‘The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.’ So bright is the radiance which it sheds upon the path of life, that the wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein. On a topic in regard to which the testimony and elucidations of Scripture itself are so overwhelming, there is no need of further witness. Else, were it at all expedient we might appeal to the Fathers and evince that the most illustrious of them perfectly harmonize with the views to which I have now given expression. Though not profoundly versed in patristic theology, I possess sufficient acquaintance with that recondite lore to know that whatever other dogma may be established by the Catholic consent of the Fathers, the denial of the right for which we contend cannot claim that sanction. I appeal to *Origen*, who in his ninth homily on Leviticus, exhorts Christians not only to attend the public ministrations of the word of God, but to read and meditate upon it at home. I appeal to *Jerome* who earnestly counsels maids and matrons to commit the Scriptures to memory. I appeal to *Augustine*, who impressively urges upon catechumens the diligent study of the Bible. I appeal to *Chrysostom*, whose eloquent enforcements of this duty would supply materials for a volume. I appeal to *Gregory*, designated the great, and a bishop of Rome withal; and I find him, in the fourth book of his Epistles, administering a grave rebuke to a physician of the court, because he did not occupy a portion of every day in reading the words of our Redeemer—‘If,’ he writes him, ‘if you were in a far country, and there received letters from the Emperor, you would be unable to sleep until you had ascertained what your earthly prince had condescended to communicate to you. The Monarch of heaven, the Lord of men and angels, has vouchsafed to convey to your hands his letters concerning your highest interests. And yet, my son, you deign not to read them. Apply to them, I entreat you, and meditate daily upon your Creator’s sayings.’

I would, in conclusion, express my gratitude to Almighty God that I am permitted to witness and unite in this hallowed celebration.—And will you permit me, Sir, in all humility, to congratulate you, at your advanced period of life, on the opportunity that has been afforded you of presiding at this Jubilee meeting, and on the Christian magnanimity you have displayed in practically expressing your change of sentiment in respect to the Society, by accepting our invitation, and honouring us with your presence.

The Rev. Mr. Geikie, in moving the third resolution, said:—

Mr. Chairman,—I rise, sir, to move the

following resolution: “Resolved that this meeting desire to express the fullest sympathy with the Parent Society in embracing this as a befitting occasion for making new and vigorous efforts for the widest possible circulation of the Scriptures, both at home and abroad.” These words, sir, I am persuaded, only express what we all feel. Who among us has not the ‘fullest sympathy’ with the great parent Bible Society, across the ocean? I am not wrong, surely, in saying that we feel towards it the profound regard which such an institution rightly claims; that we thank God for it as a great protector of the liberties which are our noblest inheritance; that we rejoice over it as a beneficent agency to crown men with glory and immortality.—The Parent Society, sir, is the mother of us all. To it, this and all other Branch Societies are indebted, at once for their usefulness and existence. It is the great sun streaming forth the light of God’s Word, and our local associations are but the lesser lights that owe their brightness to its beams.

Hither as to their fountain other stars

Repairing, in their golden urns draw light

And hence the Morning Planet gilds her horns.

The Resolution tells us that the Parent Society have embraced this as a fitting occasion for new and vigorous efforts for the still wider circulation of the Scriptures. It has been already told you in the Report in what these efforts are intended to consist. Colportage in Britain and on the Continent, and special exertions on behalf of China, India, and Australia are the principal features.—That they are the wisest and most hopeful under present circumstances, we may, I think, take for granted, from the fact that they have especially commended themselves to the wisdom, experience, and fidelity of the central committee in England.

That it is a fitting time in which to make increased exertions for Bible distribution is impressed on us by various considerations, and among others, I cannot but regard the success of the society in the past as at once a warrant and a command not only not to intermit but to increase our efforts. It is, as it were, an audible voice from eternity, to go forward. It is the direct sanction of Him whose high name is blazoned on our banners. He speaks to men now, by the sublime utterances of His Providence and Grace. And with his will thus interpreted, we cannot, dare not, refuse to endorse this resolution. Versions of the Scriptures in 175 languages, and the distributions of more than 43,000,000 copies of the whole or portions, leave us no room for doubt as to our duty for the future. Fifty years ago Infidelity and Popery well nigh shared Christendom between them, and what with the impiety of the philosopher and the priest the Bible was nearly banished, except where it shed its light in the circle of faithful Protestant households. But, now, how different the state of things by the testimony of the figures you have heard. And if we wanted a further proof of the contrast between the limited circulation of the Sacred Volume then, and its wide dissemination now, through the blessing of God on the British and Foreign Bible Society, we have only to bethink ourselves of the fact that after irradiating Europe it has shone even in the lonely and humble wigwam of our Micmac Indian. On the platform beside me sits the Missionary who has been privileged to translate a portion of the Scriptures, under the auspices of the Bible Society, into the language of the rude and