

Bibles which were never read before, or read as a matter of routine, have been carefully scanned. The points in question have been discussed with an interest that forces people to look beyond traditional views, forces them to study the times in which the various documents that constitute the Old Testament literature were written, to make allowances for Orientalisms of expression, and to separate incidentals from essentials. I am aware that the discussion of such questions is deprecated on the ground that it has an "unsettling" effect. I have faith enough to believe, however, that while every plant that our Heavenly Father has not planted shall be rooted up, believers will only be established the more deeply in the Truth. We all believe, also, that our Protestant freedom of biblical criticism is the legitimate fruit of our reverence for the Scriptures. Is there not a false reverence for the Scriptures akin to that which may be found in Abyssinian churches? A Bible is there kept on the altar, but it is swathed round by innumerable handkerchiefs and bandages, because it would be irreverent for men to gaze upon or look into the Holy Book! True reverence demands the fullest investigation, and cries to those who are afraid, "O, ye of little faith, wherefore do ye doubt?" However, all that I would now point out, is the fact that people should not assume that nothing new can be said about the marvellous Book. Nothing that leads to fresh interest being taken in it can be otherwise than helpful to true faith, in the end.

That the spirit of fearless faith animates this Society, I infer from what has been said with reference to the new English version that all of us expect to be studying in the course of a few days. That version will give an extraordinary impetus to Bible reading. Some favourite texts may be missed, on which powerful sermons have been preached, though many readers may be too ignorant of the Bible to be much struck with the changes. I find that, as a rule, people are singularly ignorant of the Scriptures. In connection with this new version, also, numbers of people are afraid of the "unsettling" process, but surely it argues very little reverence for the Scriptures to say that, when we can get what is, demonstrably, a more accurate version of what Jesus said and wrote, we shall continue to prefer the mistakes of copyists and translators to the pure Word. I do not at all mean that this Society should at once take the new and cease to circulate the old version. On the contrary, I think it should wait until the Christian consciousness of the people shall decide which is, on the whole, the better version, and that it should also have regard to the opinions and action of the parent Society. Better surely to continue to put up with a few mistakes, or even many mistakes, than to bring about divided efforts with regard to the one work in which all Protestant churches are united. I quite agree with the sentiment of the Rev. Mr. Rainsford, that the true expression of unity and the true path to higher unity, is in working together. We welcome, then, everything that induces men and women to study the Scriptures, just because we dread, not intelligence, but indifference, not enquiry, but routine, not the spiritual, but the formal.

The resolution I submit indicates some of our reasons for valuing the Scriptures. First, it is the symbol and basis of the spiritual unity that binds Christendom together. It is, indeed, the great symbolical Book of Christendom. Thank God for that unity, and thank God for the Book. If, then, we value symbols according to their sacredness, impressiveness, antiquity and permanence, how must we value the great symbol or creed of the Christian Church? After all, however, we should never forget that all symbols are liable to be abused under the plea of reverence. Men are fallen, and prone, therefore, to rest in the sign, instead of being led by it to the end signified. Think of the illustrations of this which the history of our race supplies. What symbol could be more precious to the Old Testament church than the brazen serpent? How God had honoured it! It was the very symbol