

on Him, died a death of shame. Yet wait, and all is changed. The tomb emptied, the soldiers scattered, the council baffled, the disciples convinced, the portents of Pentecost, the baptism of the multitude, the terror of Herod, the boldness of Stephen—what do these prove, but that the words of Christ lived, moved, and conquered after all! Little by little the heaven spreads, and the conflict thickens, and the light grows, until the most vital and aggressive and irresistible and unmanageable power on the earth is the society of believers in a crucified Jesus; and a temple made without hands, in the place of the temple made with hands, grows stately and strong, clothed with the glory of God. My friends, all that is happening still, will go on happening till the Word made flesh comes back in His glory; and our gathering here to day is an instance of it. For this sentence of Christ declares a marked and everlasting contrast between what looks permanent, but is really transitory, and what looks transitory but is really permanent; between Heaven and earth on one side, and Christ's words on the other. Heaven and earth are, of course, the figures of a parable, and we may explain them in their marked contrast with the word of Christ, either in that material sense which lies on the surface—the firmament with its twinkling worlds, and the earth with its seas and rivers, its cities and palaces, its smiling vineyards and its everlasting hills; or in a more spiritual sense, yet really cognate to the meaning of the text, either as empire in antagonism to religion, or as the visible organization, framework, and ritual of the Church on earth when compared with her resurrection life in that heavenly city of which it is said there is no temple there.

We shall always worship, but forms will have passed away; we shall always be thinking, and weighing, and learning, but by new symbols, and perhaps a new language; for the glass in which we now see darkly there will be the vision of God; one thing will remain, which I suppose we shall love and ponder and discuss and feed on as ever—the imperishable word of Christ.

For of this word, He says, it shall not pass away; but abide for evermore!

What does He mean by it?

In its primary sense it declares the entire fulfilment of that prophetic word that then left His lips. In a secondary yet not unimportant sense also, its principle is applicable to the volume of Holy Scripture as settled by the canon, and in that English version which we all so gladly use and so reverently love.

In his remarkable book, "The Bible in the Church," which I wish every member of this congregation would procure and master, Professor Westcott has shown by what slow degrees, and under what Divine guidance, what we now call the Holy Bible assumed its present form, and has rigidly maintained it from St. Athanasius's day down to our own. "The formation of the collection of Holy Scripture was according to natural laws. Slowly, and with an ever-deepening conviction, the Churches received after trial, and in some cases after doubt and contradiction, the books which we now receive. The judgment, which was in this manner the expression of the fulness of Christian life, was not confined in early times by rigid or uniform laws; the extreme limits of the collection were not marked out sharply, but rather, the outline was at times dim and wavering, yet not so as to be incapable of a satisfactory adjustment.

"In their origin the writings of the Apostles seem to have been both casual and fragmentary. But an instinctive reverence invested the immediate disciples of the Lord with a natural dignity, and their writings moulded the thoughts of those who succeeded them. Experience soon deepened and defined the impression of this Divine instinct. Controversy brought out the decisive authority of the apostolic texts. The corruption of the evangelic tradition, placed the simple grandeur of the four Gospels in clear pre-eminence. The words of the Apostles were placed more and more frequently by the side of the words of the Prophets; and as the whole Christian body realized the fulness of its common life, the teaching and the books, which had been in some sense the symbol of a part only, were ratified by the whole.