

Let this be our subject then at this happy gathering, and let us now, by the help of Almighty God and the guidance of His Spirit, strive to realize all that is conveyed to us by the Apostle when, in two words telling one holy truth, He sets before us the essential and enduring characteristics of the inspired and written Word. "Living and abiding." How the words seem to come home to the experiences of each individual heart!

"Living and abiding." "Oh, true and telling words," may now many a servant of Christ in this large congregation be saying within his own spirit, "Living? Have I not found it to be life itself, and proved it by that truest of all tests and testimonies—the testimony of a suffering soul? When God last mercifully vouchsafed to deal with me, when sorrow broke over me as a wave, was it not the living and abiding comfort of the Holy Scripture that alone sustained me when human consolation was fruitless, and even human sympathy was unavailing? Or when again, in my last heavy trial, the shadows of sins past and present were resting as night upon the soul—when the sorrow of the world was darkening all around me, and prayer itself was dying away on my lips, do I not vividly and thankfully remember how I had yet faith left to go to my long-closed Bible, and how the first words on the chance-opened page seemed to me as a message from God Himself, and how, in a moment, the light seemed to break, and all to become changed?" "Yes, verily," such a one may say, "God's Word is a living Word. My soul has felt that life. My inner ear has heard. Yes, in that Word and by that Word, God has spoken to me as a man speaketh with his friend, and through the lips of Apostles and Evangelists the very voice has reached me of my own dear, pitying Lord." Such, I am persuaded, is the silent testimony of many a heart among us at the present time. Such the inward witness that the soul of every one of us gives, in our better moments, to the inherent and indwelling life of the Holy Scriptures.

And yet,—though this is the inner belief on which our Society was founded, though every one who now hears me most probably entertains substantially the same convictions,—though the really marvellous development of the work of our great Society may be humbly appealed to as a token from God Himself,—yet, is this the view that has been taken of Holy Scripture from the very first? Is the recognition of this living, operative, and so to say personal power of the Holy Scriptures, that which marks the teaching of the great writers and interpreters of the first ages of the Christian Church?

What can the fair and impartial student of the doctrinal history of the past say more than this: that there *are* traces of such a teaching,—traces, but no clear and general development of it.

Two things there are which we always thankfully recognise in all the estimates of Holy Scripture that have come down to us from the earlier past:—

First, the profound reverence that was ever paid to the written Word; reverence so marked, that if I were asked roughly to name that which most separates the canonical Scriptures of the New Testament from writings—say, for example, such as those of Clement of Rome, which were once deemed to have almost an equal authority—I should at once say, the manner in which Holy Scripture is quoted, and the frequency with which it is referred to. It is as though the writer felt that he could not, on his own responsibility, lay down one principle or press one deeper exhortation without that final and corroborative authority. This profound reverence is that which we cannot fail first to observe: and secondly, and equally clearly, this—that the authority of the Holy Scriptures was deemed to be final and supreme, and that they verily were regarded, to use the language of the holy man whose name I have just mentioned, as "the true utterances of the Holy Ghost." These two characteristics certainly mark the teaching of the early Church, and they are, I need hardly say, of great and enduring importance. The view, however, of the Holy Scripture on which our thoughts are now resting, and which our text brings so closely home to us, is one that found no exponent, or (to use the most guarded form of expression) no adequate exponent, among