

philosophers give for the assurance that his book would be read a thousand years hence—that there would be book-worshippers in those far-off generations who would name them side by side with Bacon and Aristotle! It is not the homage to a book that they are afraid of. Take another view of it, and suppose the German exploring expedition now at work in Greece should stumble upon a manuscript that could be authenticated as the oldest manuscript of Plato; or suppose in some as yet unvisited tomb of Egypt we should come at last upon the lost books of Manetho, could the whole receipts of this Society for a year begin to express the competition between London, Paris, Berlin, and New York to get possession of that book? And when once they had it, they would set it up in a museum, cover it with glass, lock and double lock with padlocks, chain it, and leave it for the long line of scholars and antiquaries who shall come up year after year and generation after generation to pay their homage to the book. It is not the thing that they complain of—it is *this* Book and what is in it. And wherefore? Because we are pleased to recognise in this Book an authority. Very well, if man is to have character, he must recognise authority somewhere. His conscience is but the interpreter and executor to him of law; it is not the maker of law. His conscience respects something. His intuitions recognise something. Call it the laws of nature, if you please; call it the voice of history; call it the general consent of mankind; call it abstract truth—the principle of ethics: no matter what; call it, as we do, a living and personal God—a power somewhere that can say, “Thou shalt and thou shalt not”—until man recognises that, there is no possibility of a sterling character. Well, but they offer us a substitute. Our intuitions, our moral reason—all admirable, beautiful in their way. One of the ablest expounders of these doctrines says, the faith of the future must look for its moral law to the intuitions of the soul, not to the authority of a book. These intuitions will teach us—what? “The brotherhood of mankind, the love of the weak and the lowly, even though they be unlovely, and will pour the spirit of love into duty.” Noble, beautiful sentiments; only they were spoken 1,800 years ago, and put into a Book; and because they were recorded in that Book, and that Book has lived through these ages, there is to-day a Christian civilization, the light of which, poured into the consciousness of these philosophers, quickens their intuitions; and they think they have made some new discovery for the future of mankind, when they are only reflecting an old one. Why is it that I honour this Book? Is it because I find it speaks to my intuitions, speaks to my conscience, speaks to my reason, speaks to my whole nature, and lifts me up above from the plane of this life to where I know I shall live and live for ever? If veneration be worship, then I do worship this Book; if gratitude for all that I am and hope to be, be worship, then I do worship this Book; if loyalty to live for it—and I hope, God helping me, if need be, to die for it—be worship, I acknowledge and confess I do worship this Book; but only in such sense as this: that it meets me as a man where I most need to be met. There is such a thing as absolute truth, and I find it here. But absolute truth must have absolute authority. Now, the very fact of the power of this particular Book is one of the marvels of history, and one of the marvels also of mental philosophy, that scientists are bound to study and explain. No book has been so feared as this—feared only, however, by tyrants and haters of mankind. No book has been so hated as this is—hated only by those who would love darkness and who would do evil. But, on the other hand—and this Society is a witness for it, and it is, I think, the most striking fact with regard to the Book—no book has ever kindled such love and devotion and enthusiasm as this. We have Societies for procuring correct and revised editions of Shakespeare, and they draw together the *élite* who have an interest in that particular topic. Who would ever think of forming a Society to propagate Shakespeare all over the world; to have him translated into every tongue and sent free on the wings of the wind to all the nations of the earth? This is the only Book that stirs men to do that; and why?