

different quarters to prove that the Bible is not for all—that it is only for ‘wise and learned clerks,’ and that it belongs not to the ignorant and unlearned to search out for themselves. Nothing can be more complete, as it seems to me, than the exposure, by reason and by fact, which this first great homily gives to such propositions—propositions, alas! not wholly unknown in other regions than the Roman Church. And thought leads me to remember the fact—very precious to students of Church history and to those who feel, as surely every thoughtful man does, that, while Church history is not revelation, it is a most important informant about certain aspects of truth—that there is nothing more primitive in Church principles, nothing which, when you look at the first three or four ages at least, more perfectly answers the character of the famous formula, *semper, ubique, et ab omnibus*, than the principle of the Bible Society; that is to say, the principle that the Bible is for all, and that, being what it is, you cannot take too much pains to put it into the hands of all. I have taken some care and pains to ascertain how far this was the fact in the Christian Church during the first four centuries. During that time, at the very least, I venture to say it is irrefragably the fact that no greater teacher ever pretended to think anything of the Bible other than this—that it was Divine. That was a very favourite word for it, though I think it has rather gone out of fashion now. It was held that the Book was Divine, that if studied reverently and prayerfully it was self-sufficient as its own expositor, and that the Bible is for all. The great St. Athanasius was specially fond of the phrase, ‘the self-sufficiency of the Scriptures.’ To be sure he did not mean that they are self-sufficient to a self-sufficient man. He did not mean that any one can anyhow sit down to them and by a cursory inspection in the certainty of his own infallibility decide what they mean against ages of previous study and conclusion. But he did mean this—that the Book does so claim to speak from God and for God, and is so constructed under the providence of God, that for every soul that will give that reverence, that will give that submission, that will come with a sense of its own weakness and insufficiency and in the humility of prayer—the Book may be trusted to explain its own spiritual truth to the salvation of that soul. I need not tell you that such a principle is absolutely in harmony with devout reverence for the grave conclusions from the Word of God by the Church of Christ in many of its branches in past days, and that no thoughtful man will come direct to the oracle thinking that it is *a priori* more likely that his own *ipse dixit* respecting the Bible will be true rather than those conclusions. But that is a totally different thing from saying that God does not invite every individual man, soul and conscience and mind, to go to work upon his knees and ask (prepared for submission), ‘What says the blessed Book?’ Then, amongst other thoughts about the Bible, we may say that there is always a sort of reflection, in the true attitude of a Christian towards the Bible, of his true attitude towards his Lord.

“I hold that the Bible declines, and with fullest reason, to give its consolations where its humiliations and its mysteries are declined; that if we will find its rest we must take its yoke; that we must not pick and choose out of its revelations of eternity and of the ways of God what we will hold and what we will not. We must bow down and take the whole, in spirit and in intent at least, or what right have we to take consolation about departed friends, or other such sweet fruits of the Bible as we please? True it is that the rest of Christ only comes in proportion as His yoke is taken. So true it surely is that the comforts of the Word come only in their fullness to the soul that says ‘Yes’ to whatsoever else it really says. I will not detain the meeting further than to read a few lines about the Bible, which I picked up only a few days ago in the Cambridge library. It may be, and probably is, through my own ignorance that they were so new to myself. I doubt not there is many a studious friend of the Bible Society who knew them long ago.