

love, fatherly affection, and the like. But whereas such sentences would be read as a task, the story of Joseph is remembered with perpetual pleasure; and whereas the naked assercion of its lessons would compel us to acquiesce in our duties, the narrative insensibly fills us with admiration, and attracts our every sympathy.

This earth does not consist of the barely indispensable; neither does the Bible. We have the useful and the ornamental,—thoughts adorned in an attractive garb, bold imagery, vivid description of scenery, accounts of human wishes and human feelings. And all this shows that religion is a many-sided thing, intended to act upon us as individuals, to enter into our social intercourse, and to influence the affairs of nations.

The Bible, from its very absence of system, is adapted to every variety of character. Here are treatises and sententious maxims for the matter-of-fact and those addicted to close reasoning; biography and history for the lovers of narrative; the sympathy of kindred spirits for the afflicted; poetry for the imaginative; politics for the lovers of law; plain fare for wayfaring men, and hard matters for those delighting in the mysterious. For the same reason, it is equally suited to every clime and country. The differences between man and man are of little account compared with the many points of resemblance possessed by all in common. The greatest genius differs less from the simplest individual possessed of ordinary sanity, than the latter does from the most sagacious of irrational animals. And the same remark holds true of natures the most highly cultivated as compared with those who occupy the lowest position in the scale of civilization, and the Bible, from its artlessness and simplicity, is equally adapted to all.

(2). But, secondly, a result seemingly evil attends the form in which the Supreme Being has been pleased to reveal his will to man. Since we are left to collect our system of belief from a variety of particulars and sources, instead of having all that is necessary for us know set down in a formal series of dogmas; and since the minds of men differ widely in their modes of apprehending the truth, it follows, that the want of a complete summary of doctrine in any one part of Scripture, of which the other portions might serve as illustrations, leaves the door open for innumerable disputes as to what precise views accurately represent the mind of God's Spirit. Thus we find the Christian world agitated by endless wranglings,—now about the forms of religion, and again about the essentials of its creed; so that the church is split up into a vast number of sects, each too frequently hating the others more intensely than all hate their common enemy—sin. Perhaps there are not three doctrines of the Bible, regarding which the views of all concur; and what is extraordinary, and apparently confirms the view taken, is that all appeal to the same Bible, and not unfrequently to the same passages in support of

their peculiar opinions. Had there been any one authoritative declaration, (1) as to all the doctrines which ought to be held; (2) as to the forms of worship which ought to be practised, and (3) as to the system of church government which ought to be adopted, as there is an authoritative summary of the duties which are to be performed, does it not appear probable that the number of disputes and controversies which are the laughing stock of the infidel, and the disgrace, in great measure, of the Christian world, would be diminished?

But the very fact mentioned, that sects in their warrings appeal to the same passages in confirmation of their views, shows that the unity of sentiment which we might have expected, beforehand, to accompany a different method of revelation, would not have resulted. This is only the old imagining of the rich man in Hades, who supposed that if he had had the counsel of one sent from the other world, he would have repented. Scripture was not designed to compel assent, but to win men to believe. Revelation was not given to place man, by one mighty elevation, upon "the vantage ground of truth," but painfully to guide him thither. The journey has not been rendered less toilsome, but the path is pointed out with greater precision. Those who attend most carefully to the direction of Scripture, will find the way shorter and more pleasant, than those who, being less observant, strike out a path more rugged and devious. But all who follow its counsels, with the sincerity of humble believers in its divine authority, cannot fail of ultimately arriving at the summit.

It seems, in fact, to be a defect (shall we term it?) inherent in the very nature of language, when taken in connection with the varieties that subsist in the minds of men, that sentences, however precisely formed, are susceptible of a variety of meanings, especially when the general scope of a passage does not receive due attention. Nothing will render this more evident than an illustration from the science of law. The acts of a legislature are framed by men whose whole study it is to state their meaning with an accuracy that shall leave no place for doubt or scruple as to their meaning. But in point of fact, all their painful circumlocution is so far from preventing ambiguity, that no subject can be conceived in a state of greater confusion. And when the wars of the religious world are cavilled at by the infidel, he should point us to some branch of human investigation, whose professors are more at peace.

The grand reason why such endless discussions take place about the meaning of the Scriptures is, not that they speak with an "uncertain sound," but that men come to their pages with their opinions already formed; and ransack the Bible, not to ascertain what it says, so much as to discover some isolated passages which appear to support their views. This evil habit of isolation, of separating texts (as they are termed) from their context, is fostered by the manner in which the Bible is