

to us who look and listen across them : the *noise of a King* is through them all.

Bless the Lord, O my soul,
And all that is within me, bless His Holy Name.

GEORGE ADAM SMITH.

THE BIBLE.¹

I.

WHY do we read the Bible ? Why do we teach it ? Why do we set it in a place of its own, apart from other books and above them ?

Once the question might have been easily answered. There was a time—it is past now—when men believed in “verbal inspiration” ; believed that every verse, every line, every letter of the book was divinely, infallibly, and equally inspired ; believed in an inspired original, an inspired translation, and, I might almost say, an inspired punctuation. That simple and unquestioning faith has not come down to us. Our lot is cast in darker, stormier days ; we cannot break with the present unless we break with ourselves. We cling to a belief in inspiration, but we are often in doubt as to what inspiration means. We are eager to get at the meaning of the Book, but we are perplexed as to the true method of interpretation. That is the experience of men and women inside the churches as well as outside them. It is your experience and mine.

But still we read and revere : why ? Let me try to answer the question, not for theologians, scholars, or philosophers, but for ordinary men and women living under commonplace conditions. I shall assume nothing ; shall start with no theory. I ask what men without bias, with-

¹ An address delivered at Leeds to University students and others on November 5, 1911.

out prejudice, have thought of the Book. We might call thousands—tens of thousands—as witnesses; put them in the box and ask them for their testimony: men of to-day; men of the past; men who have helped to make the world; men whom the world has broken; men who have been lights and leaders; men who have lived alone and obscure. And the voice of the living present, the voice of the vanished past, the voice of society, and the voice of solitude, the voice of all classes, of all conditions of men, would make answer and say *The Book*.

Will you listen to some of those voices?

Take Thomas Carlyle—that austere prophet who proclaimed the gospel of duty rather than the gospel of love, and in the strength of it loyally served the Master whom he could not always see: what has he to say?

“There never was any book like the Bible, and there will never be such another.”

Put the same question to his countryman, Walter Scott, foremost in genius, foremost in fame, when his sun is setting in clouds of ruin and storm: how does he answer it?

“Read to me”—he said.

“What shall I read?” said Lockhart, who was watching by his bed.

“Can you ask me?” Scott replied, and bade him read a chapter in the Gospel of John.

No book like this.

And then I turn to one, dearer to me, if not greater than Scott or Carlyle, who suffered much and loved much, and in hiding the pain was apt to hide the love. It would be easy to find a score of passages in which Thackeray caught his inspiration from gospel or from psalm. But there is one passage in which he reveals himself unconsciously; and unconscious revelations are the surest. You remember the story of George Warrington in *Pendennis*—the young man

who has made shipwreck, and has to atone for a single act of folly by a life without ambition, without love, and almost without hope. He is left to face it all, alone ; alone with the flowers that recall the vision of joy that has come and passed him by, and with the Bible that a grateful mother has left as a parting gift ; the fading flowers, and the unfading book ; alone with them, alone with the night.

“ And the morning found him still reading in its awful pages, in which so many stricken hearts, in which so many tender and faithful souls have found comfort under calamity, and refuge and hope in affliction.”

Calamity, affliction, broken hearts : yes, no book for them like this.

May I call one witness more, and only one ? It shall be Charles Dickens, who did so much to make life more brotherly and more humane. But again one has to choose. I might give you the well-known words of his will ; but a will is a formal thing : the making of it is a solemn act ; and the words of it owe something of their impressiveness to the importance of the occasion. And so I prefer to take the letter written to his youngest son, when the boy was leaving home to join his brother in Australia, just because the letter is so unstudied, so simple, and comes so straight from the heart, and because sometimes we are wiser for our children than we are for ourselves.

“ I put a New Testament among your books, for the very same reasons, and with the same hopes, that made me write an easy account of it for you, when you were a little child. Because it is the best book that ever was, or will be, known in the world ; and because it teaches you the best lessons by which any human creature who tries to be truthful and faithful to duty can possibly be guided. As your brothers have gone away, one by one, I have written to them such words as I am now writing to you, and have entreated them

all to guide themselves by the Book, putting aside the interpretations and inventions of man."

A lamp and a guide to the feet when life is beginning ; a spring of comfort and of strength in the stress and sorrow of life ; a rod and a staff in the dark valley at the close of life : no book like the Bible.

You have heard the testimony. But what of the witnesses, and their right to speak. They speak with authority, not because they were men of learning, but because they were masters of the human heart ; because human nature, in its hopes and dreams, in its possibilities of joy and sorrow, in its greatness and its degradation, was an open book to them ; because they could read and interpret the secrets of the soul ; because their genius, through sympathy with men nobler than themselves, with men like themselves, and with men baser than themselves, their imagination and their insight, gave them a right to speak, not for themselves only, but for the race, on things that concern human nature and human life. When they speak of such things they speak of what they know, and we are bound to heed what they say. It is this fact that gives to their testimony such supreme value.

II.

And now, do you see, we have got down to bed-rock ? Religion—in the truest and deepest sense of the word—is a thing of experiment, a thing of experience. We discover its worth by living, not by study ; not by criticism, but by action. "The certainty of faith" as Bishop Creighton said, "comes from believing." "If any man willeth to do his will he shall know of the teaching, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself." It is by experience that we are to test the message of the Bible. The Bible itself is one long record of faith, and the experience of faith.

It is for spiritual experience, spiritual truth, that we should go to the Bible ; not for science, not for history, not for other knowledge of the same kind. For it is a law of the divine economy not to do for man what man can do for himself. If we go to the Bible for science, it will not serve us. Its purpose is not to answer the questions that science can, but the questions that science can not answer. It does not tell us when or how the world was made : it tells us Who made it. It does not tell us how man was created ; it tells us Who created him, and why he was created. It passes through the doors of mystery to which science has no key ; it solves the problems before which science stands, and has ever stood, helpless and dumb. And that the mind of man may understand—the simplest mind and the humblest, the mind of man in all races, in all times, in all lands—it embodies the truth in imagery. The Bible begins with parable in the book of Genesis, and ends with parable in the book of the Revelation. The trouble came because we went to it for what it does not try to give us, and because we did not read aright the message that it holds.

III.

I have been speaking of experience, as a test of religious truth, as an element of religious conviction. Let us apply the principle to the Gospels of the New Testament.

I admit, frankly and without reserve, that it makes a difference, an immeasurable difference, whether on the one hand the story that the Gospels contain, or the substance of it, was written by men who had either seen the things that they recorded, or had heard them from the lips of those who had lived with the Master ; or whether, on the other hand, those Gospels were written by men who lived a century or more later, and without anything to help them in their task save tradition and legend. Criticism has its place.

The Gospels cannot evade the test. We do not ask that they should. But I say this—that the court of criticism is not the court of final appeal—that the last word does not lie with it.

Let us assume—it is an enormous assumption—that the critics have come to their work without bias ; that they have done their work without prejudice ; that they have reached a general agreement in their conclusions ; that their conclusions have stood unchallenged for thirty, twenty, or even ten years ; that they have proved to their own satisfaction that the Gospels were not written when we believed them to be written, and that they were not written by the men whom we believed to have written them. What then ? What has criticism done ? It has touched the record : it has not touched the revelation.

Indeed, when we have got so far, our difficulties are only beginning. I might dwell on the difficulty of explaining in any reasonable way how men, not only obscure but unknown, should have had the genius—the literary, intellectual, and moral genius—to weave broken memories and fading legends into a work that stands imperishable and immortal, steadfast amid the ruinous sea of change. What answer—what sufficient answer—is there to that question ? We have a right to put the question and to insist that the question shall be answered.

Or we might fairly urge this :—if the echoes are so marvellous, what must the voice have been ? If the shadow, the dim and distant shadow, the shadowy presence with its shadowy crown, stands before the world in such regal majesty, what of the Person ? The wider the gulf of time between the men who wrote and Him of whom they wrote, the greater the mystery, the more overwhelming the marvel.

But a more profound problem is before us : the problem not of literature, but of life.

Blot out the record : the revelation remains. Discredit the messengers : the message survives. Dismiss the testimony of the Book : the testimony of experience is left. How shall we deal with that evidence ? How shall we deal with those witnesses ? How can we refuse to take account of them ? How can any theory that does not take account of them be accepted as adequate or complete ? In science, a theory, if it is to hold us, must account for all the facts—for all the things that we *see*. In religion, too, a theory must account for all the facts—for all that we *feel*. A theory that deals with a part and not with the whole, is a delusion. It must account for everything, if it is to account for anything.

And how much there is to account for. From generation after generation, from century after century, from men divided by speech, by custom, by character, by calling, the evidence flows in ; and the evidence agrees. They tell us that when burdened by the sense of sin they listened to the message of the Book and found peace. They tell us that when evil, which they knew to be evil, held them in its iron grip, they listened to the message and found deliverance. They tell us that in the dark hours when death came, or sorrow, or pain, they listened to the message, and listening found comfort and strength. They tell us that in their own experience the miracles of redemption and deliverance and healing have been repeated in new and marvellous forms. They state the facts in different ways. But as to the facts themselves, the facts of pardon, restoration, freedom, the power and the presence of Christ in the heart, they agree. Can we set aside a mass of evidence like this ? Is there any way of explaining the facts simpler and surer than the explanation of the Bible ?

There was a time when some lines of Matthew Arnold seemed to me supremely beautiful and supremely true.

In a series of superb stanzas he traces the rise of ancient civilization, its consummation, its corruption, its decay, and its despair ; and with it he contrasts the new faith that came into the world and transformed the world. It would have been salvation, he feels in these days of doubt and depression,—it would have been bliss to have lived then.

“ Oh, had I lived in that great day,
 How had its glory new
 Fill'd earth and heaven, and caught away
 My ravished spirit too !
 No thoughts that to the world belong
 Had stood against the wave
 Of love which set so deep and strong
 From Christ's then open grave.”

I still feel the beauty of the lines : I have learnt to doubt their truth. At the best they are but half true. We have lost much that was given to those early days, but we have gained more.

Ask yourselves what it must have meant when the Christian faith was still a new thing, when Christ's was a new name, when His followers were nameless—what it must have meant then to make the great experiment of faith, and to make it for the first time ; what it must have meant to break with traditions and associations, to abandon the familiar home and to go out into a strange and unknown land, to leave all, and follow Him.

We have so much, I repeat, where they had so little : nations and centuries bearing evidence, the evidence of experience, where they had but the testimony of solitary souls. So many have made the venture now ; so many have tried the experiment ; so many have tested the truth of the message by living, and by living have found it to be true. Criticism has its place. But experience has its place too. And while we listen to what criticism has to say about the record, we shall listen, if we are wise, to what

experience has to tell us about the revelation. We shall appeal from the jury of the day to the tribunal of the ages.

“Never man spake as this man”—that was the verdict of the generation that listened to the Master. “Never book spake as this Book”—that has been the verdict of generations that have heard its message: that is still the verdict of those who listen to it to-day.

Be content to leave many things unexplained. This is a world of mystery; you and I are mysteries to ourselves; the meanest flower that blows has its own impenetrable secret; the viewless wind of heaven is as full of mystery as the splendour of the midnight sky. Be content to leave many difficulties unsolved; a thousand difficulties do not make one doubt. And as for doctrine, which represents the effort of man to reduce to a logical system things that transcend logic, to express in terms of finite reason truths that are infinite, remember this—that as doctrine is expressed in speech that changes with the changes of the world, so it is also shaped and fashioned by the changing ideas of man, and that it follows and obeys the great movements of human thought. Doctrine, philosophy, thought, speech, these are things that change. But human nature remains the same; and the human heart and its needs remain unchanged; and the great facts of life—sin and sorrow and pain, and the love of what is good, and the consciousness of dependence on something higher than ourselves and better than ourselves at our best—these are things that abide.

Teach these facts, the facts of spiritual experience, not the printed book, but what your own soul has felt and seen and known, and the divine message that you yourself have heard from the voice with which God speaks to man and in man—teach these things, your own experience, what you know, not more but not less, with the passion of personal conviction and the fervour of living faith, and then you will

find that your teaching has not been in vain. For then, like your Master, you will teach with authority, and not as teach the Scribes.

Take the Book into your life. Try the precepts, test the promises ; not in thought but in action ; not in the study but in the school, the shop and the street. Prove them, not by the experience of others, but by your own. And then you will revere even more than you revere to-day the Book in which the Divine Law and the Divine Love are proclaimed and revealed ; and with new loyalty and devotion you will adore, trust and obey the Person—the Living, the Eternal Saviour—from Whom the Book derives its power.

ALFRED DALE.

THE BOOK OF JUDGES.

III. DEBORAH AND BARAK.

THE Judges, as we have seen, were local leaders, who rose up to save and deliver particular districts of Israelite territory, when danger threatened. This time the area threatened was in the north. The "Great Plain," as Josephus calls it, the "Plain of Megiddo" (2 Chron. xxxv. 22 ; Zech. xii. 11), through which the Kishon flows, bounded on the N. by the Galilæan hills and Tabor, on the E. by "Little Hermon" (*Jebel Dahî*), Jezreel, and the back of the Gilboa range, and on the S.W. by the mountains stretching out to the N.W., and ending in Carmel, is held by the Canaanites : Sisera, their leader, has his residence at Harosheth, which is identified, if not certainly, yet very plausibly, with *Tell el-Hârithiyeh*, very near the right bank of the Kishon, on the slope of an outlying spur of the Galilæan hills, which projects into the plain opposite to Carmel, and thus, as sheet V. of the great P. E. F. Map at once shows us, forms a narrow pass, less than a mile across, through which, close