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THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE  
CONSIDERED

IN

RELATION TO CHRISTIAN UNION.

A LECTURE,

BY

HENRY CRAIK.

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*Price Threepence.*

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## PREFATORY NOTICE

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The following lecture, having been delivered without being previously written out, is published from the reporter's notes. Having bestowed considerable pains upon the correction of the proofs, and, in some instances, endeavoured to render the mode of expression more exact and accurate, I trust that, although the style may betray a measure of carelessness and colloquialism, the reader will not find anything expressed in a manner unsuited to the seriousness and importance of the subject. Should any such thing have been inadvertently allowed to pass without correction, the circumstances under which the discourse was delivered will, perhaps, be admitted as an excuse.

My readers will find that I lay great stress upon the importance of mutual forbearance between those who, while agreeing in the leading doctrines of the Gospel, do yet differ widely in reference to the question of church establishments. In arguing for such forbearance I feel a strong personal interest. For many years I have endeavoured to keep up a measure of intercourse with some of the many excellent men who minister in connection with the National Church, and I should be pained to think that my convictions, as a Nonconformist, should be regarded as, in any wise, excluding me from consistently enjoying such intercourse. I could

not myself conscientiously act as a minister of any established church, but surely I am not forbidden to love and pray for those who serve in the ranks of Conformity, or to maintain friendly relations with them ; neither have I found in the clergy of the Church of England an unwillingness to treat me as a believer in Christ, and as a labourer in the service of the same Master. With some of the brightest ornaments of that Church I have had very gratifying correspondence on subjects relating to the exact study of Holy Scripture, and from that class of the clergy I have experienced much Christian courtesy. When, therefore, I maintain the possibility and desirableness of friendly intercourse being kept up between Churchmen and Dissenters I am dealing with matters in which I have had some measure of experience.

Events are continually occurring which must tend to render the questions at issue between the National Church and other Christian communities more and more practically interesting to all English Christians, and the enquiry into the due limits of state-control must, of necessity, increasingly exercise the minds of all right-hearted and thoughtful men within the pale of the English Church. May He who has revealed Himself as the author of every good gift grant unto us all, more and more fully to understand His mind in reference to all such subjects of controversy. Meanwhile, let those of us who stand outside the pale of the National Church cultivate the habit of observing and admiring all that which is worthy of admiration amongst those from whom we are constrained to differ, and let those who, fully persuaded of the necessity of the church being connected with the state, look upon those who cannot

approve of such a connection as under the influence of a narrow and injurious prejudice, be ready, at all times, ungrudgingly to acknowledge all that which they find to be in accordance with true Christian character amongst their Nonconformist brethren.

Of all Established Churches in Christendom I regard the National Church of Scotland as the one least trammelled by state connexion, and as enjoying, in fact, fully as large a measure of spiritual freedom as any ecclesiastical establishment can reasonably expect. In connexion with that church my revered father ministered for more than thirty years, and in that church he remained till called away from this world. In early life I myself looked forward to serving God in connexion with the community to which my father had belonged, and, had I been able conscientiously to submit to everything else required from candidates for the ministry in the Church of Scotland, I certainly should not, with my present light, have felt justified in relinquishing her communion on the ground *that the people ought to have an irresponsible right of rejecting any minister without reasons being assigned for that rejection.*

Not one Englishman in a thousand seems to understand the real merits of the matter at issue between those who remained within and those who relinquished their position at the secession of 1843, while the fact that the latter class forfeited their manses, their glebes, and their stipends, because of faithfulness to their convictions, has cast a halo over their cause, and directed the eyes of many from looking at the actual state of the case in the light of reason and Scripture. I regard the theory maintained by the fathers and founders



of the Free Church of Scotland as utterly impracticable, and consider it in vain to expect that any church deriving its status and emoluments from state-connexion, should be left, in all respects, as untrammelled as non-established churches.

With such convictions I could not surrender the freedom I have so long enjoyed, for the advantages of an Established Church ; but I am not called upon to judge my fellow-servants, remembering, as I do, that solemn warning : “ who art thou that judgest another man’s servant ? to his own master he standeth or falleth.”

*Hampton Park, Bristol,*

*December 17th, 1863.*

## THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE CONSIDERED IN RELATION TO CHRISTIAN UNION.

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I purpose to address you this evening on The authority of Scripture considered in relation to Christian Union. My mind has been particularly led to this subject in connection with certain meetings recently held in this neighbourhood, with the view of seeking to promote that object. Those meetings, however, while pervaded by a loving and gracious spirit, must be regarded as having only in a very partial and imperfect manner exhibited an illustration of that for which they were held.\* There can be no question, I suppose, that there is, in the hearts of true believers, especially of those who are themselves enjoying the truth, a desire after a closer, more real, and living union amongst the people of God than we have seen in our own days, or heard of, for many centuries, in the days of our forefathers. No one can be familiar with the history and characteristics of the church of Christ at the beginning, without observing a very great difference between our condition now and the condition described, for example, in the early chapters of the Acts of the Apostles; and we all, as we read the Scriptures, on the one hand, and as we look abroad on the condition of professing Christians, on the other, feel and acknowledge the difference. And thus there is a two-fold contrast, a contrast between the condition of the church as it was in the early ages and the church as it is now; and also a contrast between the actual condition of the church at the present moment, and the genuine desires and tendencies of the renewed nature. This contrast naturally leads thoughtful minds to enquire into its cause. Why is it that the church of Christ has been divided for so many ages, and is still so divided at the present hour? The subject is an exceedingly large one. Various causes have evidently tended to produce this condition of things. Some of them are of an external character, others of a deeper and more internal character, and therefore more difficult to remove. I do not now profess

\* The reference is to the Meetings of Conference held at the Victoria Rooms, Clifton, Bristol, on 8th and 9th December, 1863.

to enter on all the causes that have led to this manifest want of union, but I especially desire to direct the thoughts of Christians to what appears to my mind one important cause, viz., *a defective recognition of the supreme authority of Scripture*. I do not say that, even if this recognition were far more real, all Christians would, of necessity, be found to form the same judgments in relation to every particular contained in the Bible, but I do say that if there be not, in a goodly measure, deference to the authority of Scripture, there cannot, in the nature of things, be any stable, lasting, or real union. There are certain classes of nominal Christians who by their very profession do not receive the Scriptures as their rule of faith; and what I propose to do is, in the first place, to lay before you, in contra-distinction from the views maintained by such persons, that which I understand by the *supreme authority of Scripture*. I then propose to consider some of the modes in which this authority is practically set aside. And lastly I shall endeavour to bring before you some of the most important applications of this great Protestant principle to the subject of Christian union.

What are we to understand by *the supreme authority of Scripture*? I do not mean that every jot and tittle of our English Bible is to be accepted as of Divine authority. It is well that this should be noted, for if you over-state any truth, and assert what will not bear the test of enquiry, you injure that truth. Truth has nothing to conceal. In some cases, for example, there are mistakes originating in mis-translation. In others, there are mistakes arising from our translators having followed some faulty reading in the originals from which our translation was made. Take a case in illustration. A few Lord's days ago, when not in a sufficiently vigorous state of health to minister myself, I had the privilege of hearing your pastor preach from this pulpit.\* He took for his text the 15th verse of the 106th Psalm—"And He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul." Many a good discourse has been preached from that text, and the passage, as thus translated, illustrates a truth often experienced in the history of God's dealings with his people, and yet, in the judgment, perhaps, of all competent critics, the rendering of this verse, given in our English Bible,

\* This Discourse was delivered on Tuesday, 13th December, 1863, at Redland Congregational Church, Bristol.

is not a correct representation of the original. I was aware of the mis-rendering, and that morning having brought with me a copy of the Scriptures in French I found therein the following translation :—"He gave them their request, but He sent consumption upon their bodies." I said to myself, "How strange it would seem if any present had the French version before them, to hear their minister read 'He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul.'" Now, the French rendering is substantially correct, though the verse might, perhaps, be more accurately rendered "He gave them their request, but sent consumption—a destructive disease—upon their persons,"—in other words, cut them off by death. You all remember the narrative in the Book of Numbers, and that there is nothing said there about leanness of soul. You know that God gave the children of Israel their request, and visited them at the same time with wasting pestilence. Your pastor, being aware of the mis-translation, did not commit himself to the idea suggested by the English version. I mention this as an example of a rendering which may illustrate some important truth, but yet may fail to convey the meaning of the original. Let it be allowed that there are certain slips here and there in our translation, and certain passages in which the reading of the original followed by our translators has been found, by fuller examination of manuscripts, to be erroneous. For instance, there is a well-known passage in the 5th chapter of the 1st Epistle of John,\* respecting the three heavenly witnesses, which every educated Christian knows to be of no authority whatever. The above passage is not found in a single Greek manuscript of the slightest critical value, and, in the judgment of all Protestant critics of any eminence, is considered to be purely an interpolation. How foolish it is of any to say, "you must not tell the people this," as if the truth needed anything like concealment.

But whilst I admit that there are imperfections in our excellent Translation, I feel it equally important to re-assure the timid and questioning that God has so over-ruled even the modes of transcription and of translation as that no erroneous readings or faulty renderings interfere in any essential respect with the authority and teachings of the

\* The words that ought to be omitted (in I. John v. 7, 8) are from "in heaven" to "in earth" inclusive.

Bible. The more correct reading will sometimes bring out the meaning of a passage more clearly, and of this I would give one or two illustrations. In the 15th verse of the 3rd chapter of the 1st Epistle of Peter you read, "Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts." The true reading is, "Sanctify the Lord Christ in your hearts." This is a most important point, because the reference is to the passage contained in the 8th of Isaiah, where the prophet utters this exhortation: "Sanctify the Lord of Hosts Himself." The corresponding expression of Peter being, "the Lord Christ," shows that, in the mind of the apostle, Jehovah, the Lord of Hosts, was equivalent to the Lord Jesus Christ. In the 8th verse of the 4th chapter of that same Epistle you read, "Above all things have fervent charity among yourselves, for charity *shall* cover the multitude of sins." How often has this passage been understood to teach that liberality to the poor will avail to cover the sins of the giver. Surely such a notion is one of the clearest specimens of what may be termed the Popery of Protestantism. The meaning of the passage, as you know, is very different. The true meaning comes out more distinctly if we translate, according to the amended text, "Above all things have fervent charity among yourselves, for charity (or love) covereth a multitude of sins." "Hatred stirreth up strifes," says the wise man, "but love covereth all sins." That is, the natural tendency of love is to cover all sins. "Have fervent charity," and that will lead you to throw the mantle of love over the faults and errors of your fellow creatures. However, I must not proceed further on this part of the subject, as it would require a lecture to itself.

If asked what I understand by the supreme authority of Scripture, I say again, I do claim for the Bible as correctly read—the Bible as exactly translated—the Bible as soundly expounded and applied—I claim supreme authority in all matters of faith and practice. For instance, suppose an enthusiast were to read the command of God to Abraham, "take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee unto the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of." Suppose he were to say, "Here is a scriptural command," and apply it to himself, and conclude that God meant him to act accordingly—that would be an instance of

the abuse of the authority of Scripture. There are many things to be taken into account before we can point to a particular passage, and say, "we are to act in accordance with this." We must understand the circumstances. We must understand the distinction between this dispensation and that of the Old Covenant. We must make a distinction between what was incumbent on the Jews and what is incumbent on Christians. We, therefore, do not mean that people must act according to all they find written in the Bible. What we mean by the authority of the Bible, is the authority of the Bible when rightly read, correctly translated, and judiciously expounded and applied. Its teachings, when thus elicited, are to be received with the most entire deference. In regard to the correction of received texts, the exact rendering of the originals, and the careful exposition of the meaning, there is a demand, on account of the present condition of the church of Christ, of a far higher standard of intelligence and learning than is commonly found as yet, either among the teachers or the taught in our Christian assemblies. There has been, for centuries past, a great deficiency as to diligence in all these particulars, and only within the last fifty years has there been an awakening to the importance of more earnest, diligent examination into all those matters that have to do with the revelation of the will of God.

Having thus endeavoured, as plainly and distinctly as I can, to set before you what I understand by the supreme authority of Scripture, I come now, as briefly as possible, to refer to two classes of nominal Christians by whom this is practically set aside. If Scripture be of supreme authority it must be of sole authority. Therefore when the Romanist tells me "Scripture is of authority, but we must take along with it the authority of the fathers; Scripture is very good, but then we must take along with it the headship of the Pope; Scripture is to be obeyed, but then we must interpret Scripture in accordance with the traditions of the church;" "Well," I say, "such an authority given to Scripture is utterly worthless, and renders Scripture practically of no authority." If we cannot get at the truth without first settling what the fathers thought about it—and no easy matter that would be—if we cannot determine anything from Scripture without first asking the opinion, or rather getting the decision of the Pope of Rome,

if we cannot act according to Scripture, except as interpreted by the customs and traditions of the Roman Catholic Church, then, assuredly, Scripture is practically of no authority whatever, and therefore all those who uphold Romanism, all those who, though nominally connected with the Protestant church, are yet, in heart and practice, devoted to the same principles by which Romanism is distinguished—all such persons stand outside of that body with which any real practical union can be maintained. There can be no real union with Rome in whatever form Romanism appears. I do not dwell on this, because there is probably no one present who would uphold Romanism. The sole authority of Scripture has been the great subject of controversy between Protestants and Papists from the beginning. Ever since the days of Wycliffe, in England (aye, and before his days,) controversy has been maintained between the traditions of the Church, the headship of the Pope, and the authority of the Fathers, on the one side; and the simple testimony of Scripture on the other.

But, in recent times, a new class of assailants of the Bible has arisen, persons who profess in general terms to receive Christianity, who profess to believe in the mission of Christ, and who even profess, in many instances, to be Christian ministers, who yet refuse to receive the decisions of Holy Scripture, except in so far as those decisions are according to what some of them call their "intuitional consciousness." The assailants to whom I refer cannot well be classed under any one designation. I have thought, again and again, how shall I describe these people? Shall I call them Neologians, Rationalists, Anti-supernaturalists, Anti-scripturalists, Semi-sceptics, or Semi-infidels? They profess to be servants of Christ, and yet practically call in question Christ's teaching and that of his apostles. The Neologians of Germany, and their imitators and followers in England, profess to deny everything of a supernatural character, saying, "such and such a thing cannot be. It is recorded in Scripture, but it is altogether incredible, we never saw such a thing done, it is never done now, and therefore the record must be erroneous." This sort of interpretation belongs to the more advanced Neologians. There are others in this country who do not deny everything that is supernatural, but the tendency of whose speculations is to strip the Word of God of its authority over the conscience, and to destroy its influence on the heart

and conduct. You have all heard of Bishop Colenso, and his recent attacks upon the authority of Scripture. The Bishop has long been distinguished for very high attainments in science, and he may be a man of kind and amiable character in private life, but very many amongst those most qualified to judge of such matters will admit that he is very greatly wanting in the caution, seriousness, and reverence demanded by all theological enquiries. He does not scruple to set aside entirely the authority of our Lord and his Apostles whenever he happens to meet any difficulty, or any statement which appears to him hard to be received. For instance, he does not deny that Christ and his apostles continually referred to the Old Testament as of Divine authority. He does not deny that the words our blessed Lord uses in the 16th chapter of Luke—"If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead"—do imply that Christ looked upon the Old Testament as being the standard of appeal. He does not deny this, and he tries to shuffle out of the difficulty in several ways, till at last, shut up in a corner, he comes to the marvellous decision, (marvellous, indeed, in any one professing to receive Christ, as sent of the Father, to be the Saviour of sinners)—comes to this most sapient conclusion—it is quite true Christ sanctioned the Divine authority of the Old Testament, but it might be because he knew no better! Such is the substance of the Bishop's statement. We meet with similar views in some portions of our widely-circulated periodical literature. I was exceedingly shocked when, some months ago, a friend lent me the July number, for the present year, of Macmillan's magazine. I had thought the book was of a very respectable character, though I had seen but little of it, but I found in that number an article in favour of Colenso, written by one who may be regarded as a representative of the more advanced school of this class of assailants. The writer of that article makes out that Bishop Colenso has proved that the statements of Scripture are only to be received when they are substantiated by some testimony additional to the testimony of the Bible itself. Whether the Bishop would go so far as this I do not know, but this the defender of the Bishop maintains, without any reservation. The article in defence of Colenso most distinctly asserts that nothing that the Bible states is of any authority except confirmed by some other authority.



Let any one reflect on the obvious results of such a theory, and then let any honest man—I don't say any Christian man, but any man of common sense and common honesty—tell me what, in that case, would be the value of the Bible—the Bible that has been given as a revelation from God, the Bible that tells us of our blessed Lord drawing aside the curtain that separates the visible and the invisible, and telling of His coming in glory, of the resurrection of the body, and of the solemn realities connected with the doom of the lost on the one hand, and the glorification of the saved on the other. Supposing this canon were adopted, that nothing is to be received on the testimony of the Bible itself without some other testimony, what would be the value of all this testimony regarding the unseen world. Tell a young man “The Bible is a very good book, containing a great many good things, but it is of no authority unless you get some other authority to confirm its statements,” the young man would say “It tells me of serious things connected with eternity, and gives me very solemn warnings about the results of going on in sin, but how do I know that those warnings are anything more than mere imaginations of the writers, inasmuch as I am to believe nothing in the book except I have some other testimony for it.” The reasonings of the Bishop, when carried out to their obvious consequences, unquestionably justify the representation of his admirer. Such a representation may not be consistent with certain other statements contained in other parts of his book; but it is often the character of error to betray the grossest inconsistency. If that poor misguided bishop were before me, I would desire to press home upon his conscience the serious consequences involved in professing, at one time, his reverence for Christ and for Scripture, and at another so dealing with Scripture as to denude it of that which is fitted to give it authority over the consciences and the hearts of men. If we were reasoning with avowed infidels like Paine and Voltaire, we would send them to the many books written on the evidences of Christianity, such as the works of Bishop Butler, of Paley, of Dr. Chalmers; but we are now speaking of men who tell us that they believe in Christianity, while they refuse to submit to the teachings of its founder, and sit in judgment on the writings of His apostles. Is this the honour due to God's Word? Is it among those who have given to the Bible so questionable a reception, that the trophies of its power are to be found? Would you

so treat any honest man that came to your house, and sat as an honoured guest at your table? Suppose such a visitor has been abroad, and seen foreign lands that you have not seen, and is describing the characteristic features of countries which you have never visited, and you should interrupt his discourse by telling him that you cannot receive a word of what he says, unless it is confirmed by the authority of others, would he not, if he had any self respect, rise up and walk out? Would it not just be saying, "You are a liar!" if you tell a man you cannot believe a word he says, unless confirmed by some other testimony! And this is the way in which these semi-sceptics—to use the gentlest term—treat this blessed book. The condition of things is altered from what it was in the days of Voltaire, and in the days of Paine, in this country, and there is a grosser inconsistency about our present sceptics, than about the older ones. They did not mince the matter, but boldly maintained that Scripture was the work of imposture. Now, for men to use fine phrases expressive of their admiration of the Scriptures, and yet to make out that they are full of misstatements and fables, exhibits grosser inconsistency, and a more indefensible line of conduct than that of those who deny the authority of Scripture altogether, and look upon the whole as merely a fabrication. Such persons I deliberately charge with maintaining a theory by which all hope of arriving at a satisfactory acquaintance with the import of Divine revelation is set aside. Here is a book given professedly for the purpose of making us acquainted with those things which could not have been known except by a communication from God, and yet, according to them, the record is so imperfect that it is impossible, by any conceivable process, to distinguish that portion of the book deserving our firmest confidence, from that which is altogether fabulous and untrustworthy. The modern form of scepticism assuredly is more inconsistent with itself than the more sweeping and daring assaults of our earlier infidels. It is therefore in vain to expect that true Christian union can be enjoyed between those who on the one hand bow to the authority of Scripture, and those on the other who, either like the Romanists, mix up the traditions of men with the testimony of God, or reject whatsoever they find in Scripture not in accordance with their tastes or sentiments. Without some common standard of

appeal there can be no prospect of divisions among Christians being healed. Where there is subjection of mind and heart to that one standard, there are, at least, the first principles of union. The acknowledgment of Scripture as the test of religious truth, is therefore essential to the accomplishment of that which the renewed nature instinctively desires.

This leads me, in the last place, to notice a little more fully the practical relation between the heartfelt reception of the Bible as of Divine authority, and the attainment of Christian union. Here I would notice that the authority of Scripture has to do with Christian union because of such union being a matter of solemn injunction by our blessed Lord and by his immediate followers. The commands of Christ, the only Head of the church, and the only Lawgiver of his people, require all his followers to be united. Paul tells us that we are to receive one another as Christ has received us to the glory of God. Love to the brethren, according to our Lord himself, constitutes the distinguishing badge of true discipleship, as witnessed by our fellow men: "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."—John xiii. 35. This injunction does not necessarily imply perfect agreement in religious conviction, but it requires that we should not allow diversity of judgment to interfere with the exercise of mutual love. We must first get rid of everything that supersedes the authority of Scripture. Then, having taken Scripture as our one standard, we must make allowance for a measure of diversity of judgment. Some Christians may call themselves Churchmen, and others may occupy the position of Nonconformists; but the adherents of an ecclesiastical establishment may not look down with a feeling of superiority upon their brethren outside its pale; nor may those who occupy the ranks of Nonconformity regard with suspicion or dislike the adherents of a statelier worship and a more imposing ritual. This was one of the greatest difficulties in the way of a fuller recognition of Christian union at the meetings of last week. There was a shyness on the part of those who hold the principle of religious establishments, and a shyness also on the part of those opposed to that principle. Now what I maintain is this, that there need be no such shyness. There is a good deal to be said on both sides, and no man, whether Churchman or dissenter,

ought to be considered in any way adverse to Christian union, because he happens to hold, on this vexed question, very decided convictions. I believe there was a feeling amongst some, that it was better for those who held decided convictions, whether in favour of the union of Church and State, or against that union, to keep away. I am not sure whether expressions were not used to this effect—"We don't want the violent men on either side." My answer is, "we don't want the *violence*, but we want the *men*." We are not satisfied without the men, but well satisfied without the violence; and if, on either side, in a moment of irritation, the cloak of violence has been mistaken for the cloak of zeal, I would have those who have thus erred to throw off the one garment and put on the other, but not to stay away from meetings professedly called for the promotion of Christian union among all those who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity and truth. This point I commend to all Christian men, especially to all in our own city, because I have reason to believe that, on the part of some, there was a desire that those who held strong convictions, in regard to the question of religious establishments, should not take part in the recent conference. Surely strength of conviction, on either side, ought to be no bar to union. It is a most momentous question—which is in the right, but it is not a question which should be allowed to stand in the way of true Christian fellowship between all who love the Saviour. I can hardly think there is any one here who does not sympathise with these sentiments. I can hardly think if there be a Churchman within these walls, that he would say—"I cannot have anything to do with that man, because he is opposed to church establishments;" and surely no intelligent Dissenter would say—"I cannot have anything to do with that man, because he happens to be attached to the Church of England." If we are to allow these things to divide us, there never can be real, hearty, expansive Christian union.

Again, although, in spite of diversity of sentiment, there may be genuine affection and mutual forbearance, yet true union will be promoted by the cultivation of a spirit of candid and honest enquiry respecting points of difference. There are, perhaps, many adherents of the National Church who have adopted their religious opinions simply from education. The same is the case with many

Dissenters ; but if the Word of God be the only standard, exercise of soul, in reference to its Divine teaching, is essential to vigorous health and spiritual growth. For instance, you will find, perhaps, those who tell you, if asked why they belong to the Church of England—"I was brought up in the Church of England, and, all my connexions belong to that communion." A Dissenter, again, will lay stress upon the fact that the members of his family, for several generations, have been Nonconformists. This sort of conviction, that comes just in the way a man inherits the estate of his father, is really worth very little. If our religious convictions don't cost us a real exercise of mind, real searching into the Word—if one is a Churchman simply because he was born in connexion with Church people—and another is a Dissenter simply because he was born in connexion with Dissenters,—such adherence, either to Church or Dissent, is of little value. If any present have taken up their ecclesiastical positions simply on the ground of convenience, or on the ground of what they have been taught by those who have had the care of their education, they act just on the principles of Mohammedans and Papists, who are Mohammedans and Papists because their ancestors were so before them. Each party should candidly consider what the other is able to advance. It must be admitted, by those who are opposed to church establishments, that though in many things we all admire the Reformers and Puritans, yet the great majority of both Reformers and Puritans were Church Establishment men. It is quite true that Wycliffe was an exception—Wycliffe, the morning star of the Reformation, would be considered by good Churchmen as a very extravagant man, for he was for entirely doing away with all state endowments, therefore, on this account, while they look on him as a very good man, they would consider him greatly wanting in sound judgment. But, with this exception, most of the leading men, both among our Reformers, and among the Puritans, were decidedly in favour of a church establishment ; and surely this, though it does not prove the principle to be correct, shows how foolish it is for any one to say that those who hold that principle are not to be borne with. If the Scriptures be the one standard it becomes us to see that all our creeds, ordinances, and religious practices be tested thereby. Let us not be afraid of our inquiries leading us into the ranks of our opponents. *Truth is valuable to every one, and there-*

*fore to be diligently followed wherever it may lead us ; it cannot lead us in a wrong way, nor conduct us to a wrong termination. Truth, hitherto unknown, is better than error, however familiar to our thoughts, and however tenaciously held hitherto.*

In conclusion, let me exhort you all to a more earnest and prayerful dealing with the "law and the testimony." If by this Book all our views of divine truth must be tested, and all our actions judged, surely those professing Christians who neglect the study of it, are guilty of serious inconsistency. Those who can only afford a small portion of time for the perusal of its pages, ought, at least every day, to seek to have their minds increasingly enlightened, and their hearts increasingly impressed by its heavenly instructions, while those who can afford a greater amount of time for the study of its contents, should seek to combine diligent enquiry with earnest prayer, and, as the opportunity may be given them, should endeavour to acquire such information as may aid them in the clearer understanding of its divine utterances, and the fuller enjoyment of its excellencies and beauties.

To the Christian student, the study of Holy Scripture opens up a wide, delightful, and exhaustless scope for diligent investigation. The languages in which the oracles of God were originally written, the more important of the variations occurring in the ancient MSS., and the grounds on which one reading may legitimately be regarded as of higher authority than another, the examination of the Ancient Versions, the perusal of the earlier English Translations, the exact rendering of difficult passages, these and other kindred subjects of enquiry furnish enough for the labour of the longest life.

But, above all, the experimental application of what we read must never be neglected. Prayer, meditation, and self-enquiry, must ever accompany our habitual perusal of the Bible ; nor must we allow ourselves ever to forget that, while all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, it has been given for the very purpose that it might be found "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." II. Tim. iii. 16, 17.

Let none whose opportunities for Scripture enquiry are but limited allow themselves to think that they are, by their external circumstances, precluded from entering into its meaning

or from enjoying the comfort and refreshment which its perusal is fitted to impart. How often the uneducated Christian resembles the poor cottager so admirably described by the poet Cowper in contrast with the famous infidel, Voltaire :

“ View him at Paris in his last career,  
 Surrounding throngs the demigod revere :  
 Exalted on his pedestal of pride,  
 And fumed with frankincense on every side,  
 He begs their flattery with his latest breath,  
 And smothered in't at last, is praised to death !  
 Yon cottager, who weaves at her own door,  
 Pillow and bobbins all her little store ;  
 Content though mean, and cheerful if not gay,  
 Shuffling her threads about the livelong day,  
 Just earns a scanty pittance, and at night  
 Lies down secure, her heart and pocket light ;  
 She, for her humble sphere by nature fit,  
 Has little understanding, and no wit,  
 Receives no praise ; but, though her lot be such,  
 (Toilsome and indigent,) she renders much ;  
 Just knows, and knows no more, her Bible true—  
 A truth the brilliant Frenchman never knew ;  
 And in that charter reads, with sparkling eyes,  
 Her title to a treasure in the skies.  
 Oh, happy peasant ! Oh, unhappy bard !  
 His the mere tinsel, hers the rich reward ;  
 He praised perhaps for ages yet to come,  
 She never heard of half a mile from home ;  
 He, lost in errors, his vain heart prefers,  
 She, safe in the simplicity of hers.”

Let your minds often ponder on the leading verities of the Word of God. Let it be your constant effort and prayer to enter, with more affecting realization, into those truths which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, but which God, by His Spirit, hath revealed to them that love Him. Avoid all controversy about matters in themselves utterly trivial. My spirit is, I confess, stirred within me when I see rational and immortal beings occupying themselves with discussions about questions of the most puerile character, and, face to face with the great facts of *sin* and *redemption*, seriously discussing the momentous enquiry as to whether or not candles should be placed on what they, in imitation of the Papists, call the altar, and whether, if so placed, they should be lighted in the day-time. May God deliver his professing church from all such practices, opposed as they are to the whole spirit of the Gospel and equally inconsistent with the dictates of sound reason.

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