

COMMON SENSE THOUGHTS

ON

THE BIBLE.

FOR

COMMON SENSE PEOPLE.

By WILLIAM DENTON.

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THIS pamphlet, which was first published by me sixteen years ago, has been out of print for some time. At the urgent request of many who have been benefited by its perusal, I have, after rewriting it, sent it out again to stir up thought and help men out of darkness into light.

WILLIAM DENTON.

WILLESLEY, June, 1869.

# COMMON SENSE THOUGHTS

ON

## THE BIBLE.

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THERE is nothing more sacred than truth. We should love it above all things, and be willing to make any sacrifice for its sake. We should abide by its teachings, how far soever they may lead us from what some men call orthodoxy, and into what the same men call heterodoxy. For truth is a blessing to all, being the perception of things as they are: but error is a constant curse, whether in the beggar's heart or the doctor's; spoken by the fireside, or from the tasselled pulpit.

We never can be sure that our ideas are correct, or our beliefs true, until we have examined them fairly, and scrutinized them without prejudice; otherwise we may be hugging an error to our bosoms, because we were taught it, and casting the truth from us with disdain. The more nearly allied to our present welfare and future happiness any thing is or professes to be, the more narrowly should we examine, the more carefully should we investigate it; remembering that there is nothing good that is false, and that a wise man will always be glad to exchange an error for a truth.

The subject I purpose to examine is the BIBLE. Is it all true? Should we esteem it as holy, and make it our guide in all things? or should we regard it as a human production, liable to all the errors and mistakes common to man's work, and no more to be regarded as a rule of faith and practice than it can be proved to be reasonable and true?

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#### 4 COMMON SENSE THOUGHTS ON THE BIBLE.

With the exception of the Quakers, Christian sects unite in calling the Bible the word of God, and regard it as the infallible standard of truth and duty.

Taking the ideas of God generally held by Christians, I will give some reasons for not believing this.

##### THE BIBLE ITSELF MAKES NO SUCH PRETENSIONS.

It nowhere says that the sixty-six books of which it is composed are the word of God. If it did, it would be no proof that it was so; but that God should write a book, or cause it to be written, and never tell us that he had done so, or that the book was his, is extremely improbable. In no single passage of the Bible is any such doctrine taught: it was left for men in after-times thus to exalt these records and traditions of the past. There is not only no statement in the Scriptures that the whole Bible is the word of God, but there is no writer of it who claims that his book or books are the word of God. David seems to have regarded the ten commandments, and the law supposed to be given by Moses, as God's word; but this is far from claiming that title for all the books that now go by that name. Several of the Bible writers say, "Thus saith the Lord," as a preamble to some portions of their writings; but they leave us to conjecture how he said it, — by audible voice, by impression on the mind, or whether they use the expression, as the early Quakers did, for the strong impression of their own minds. Paul, indeed, says, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction," &c. But it should be remembered that the books of the New Testament were not referred to by Paul, for at that time they had no existence; and if the books of the Old Testament, to which he refers, were all profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness, he must have had a different list from ours.

There are several theories of inspiration. The most commonly received and orthodox theory of the inspiration of the Bible, is, that God appointed men to write it, and breathed his spirit into them: so that they gave a faithful transcript of his mind or will. Some believe that every word was dictated to them; while others believe that the ideas were suggested, and they were left to choose the language in which to convey those ideas.

Let us by the light of reason, man's sure guide, aided by nature, that universal revelation of the infinite Spirit, — let us test this book, and see whether it is such a book as we might reasonably expect God to dictate, either verbally or ideally; whether it is in agreement with reason, with nature, and with the character ascribed by its believers to the divine Being.

#### A BOOK TO BE GOD'S SHOULD AGREE WITH NATURE.

If the Bible is God's word, it will agree with the sciences of geology, astronomy, geography, meteorology, and all others based on immutable law.

In the first chapter of the Book of Genesis, the writer represents God as being employed for five days in making this little globe, and yet forming the countless millions of celestial orbs in one day. Five days spent by Omnipotence in framing and adorning this tiny atom; and the universe, with its millions of mighty suns, formed at a breath, and carelessly dismissed with the five little words, "He made the stars also"! The same writer informs us that there were three evenings and mornings upon the earth before the sun was made, though one reason given for its creation is "to divide the day from the night." It would be just as reasonable to represent apples growing before trees had an existence, or trees before the earth, or children before their fathers, as this. There is the best of reason for believing that the earth is the child of the sun, and that our great luminous centre existed for ages before the earth came into being.

The Bible writers speak of the stars falling from heaven and falling to the earth (Matt. xxiv. 29; Rev. vi. 13; Isa. xxxv. 4), when it is certain, if one fell, there would be no room for another; and, since most of the stars are larger than the earth, if there was any falling, by the law of gravitation, the earth would fall to the stars. The Bible teaches that there is a firmament, which God called heaven, dividing the waters that are on the earth from the waters that are above the earth, consequently, the firmament is below the clouds; and that in this firmament are set the sun and moon: there are windows in it, which are opened to allow the rain to fall through, and shut again, that the earth may be blest with fair weather. The sun and moon are therefore below

the clouds, and on a fine day cannot be more than four or five miles high! See Gen. i. 6, 14-18, vii. 11, viii. 2.

The geography of the Bible is quite as incorrect as its astronomy. It speaks of the "ends of the earth" in Jer. x. 13, and in more than twenty other places; of the "foundations of the earth" in Isa. li. 13, and in a dozen other places; the "pillars of the earth" in Sam. ii. 8, and two other places; and David assures us in the Ninety-third Psalm, "that the world is established, that it cannot be moved." Under the earth, some of the Bible writers supposed there was a large collection of water, inhabited by various animals (Ex. xx. 4), and that, on this subterranean ocean, God had founded the world (Ps. xxiv. 1). The man who wrote the account of the deluge saw no difficulty in the way of drowning the world when the "fountains" of this "great deep were broken up."

Its geology is no nearer the truth. It teaches that God made the earth and all upon it, the heavens and all therein, in six days, about six thousand years ago. (Ex. xx. 11; Gen. i.) According to King James's Bible, the one in common use, from Adam to the flood was 1,656 years; from the flood to Jesus, 2,348 years; and thence to us, 1,869 years; making in all, 5,873 years. Since Adam was made on the sixth day, the "beginning" was but one week previous to this. What says science? Astronomy teaches that there are stars so distant, that light would take millions of years to travel from them to us. Geologists teach that the earth has existed for millions of years. Lyell, speaking of them, says, "All have arrived at the same conclusion respecting the great antiquity of the globe, and that, too, in opposition to their earliest prepossessions, and to the popular belief of the age."

The Bible also teaches that the first created organic existences were grass, herbs, and fruit-trees (Gen. i. 11). Nothing could be much farther from the truth. Dr. Mantell says, "A few fuci, mollusca, and polyparia are the first evidence of organic existence; these are followed by fishes, next reptiles, then birds and mammals." Instead of grass, herbs, and fruit-trees, then, we have seaweeds, shellfish, and coral polyps. In this agree all geologists; for in all parts of the earth, the lowest fossiliferous rocks yield only marine forms exceedingly low in the scale of existence; and many millions of years passed after living beings

came into existence, before grass, herbs, and fruit-trees made their appearance. Prof. Hitchcock, in his "Geology" (page 295), says, "Moses describes vegetables to have been created on the third day, but animals not until the fifth. Hence about one-third of the fossiliferous rocks, reckoning upwards, or those deposited during the first three days, ought to contain only vegetables: whereas animals are found as deep in the rocks as vegetables; nay, in the lowest group, nothing but animals has yet been found."

Should land-plants of very simple forms be found very much lower than they have yet been discovered, which is very probable, it will still be true that vast ages passed after living beings existed on the globe, before grass, herbs, and fruit-trees had any being.

The writer of the first chapter of Genesis informs us, that, on the fifth day, God created every winged fowl, every living creature that moveth, and great whales (Gen. i. 20-22). According to him, the first created animals were "moving creatures, that hath life," whatever that may mean, fowls and whales; and these were brought into existence on the same day. Gray and Adams in their "Geology" say (page 315), "The earliest animals were principally radiata, mollusca, and fishes. They prevailed almost exclusively until near the close of the carboniferous period, when we find the first evidence of the existence of reptiles. With the triassic period, birds were for the first time introduced." (This work is a text-book for schools, and is as biblical as its authors could decently make it.) No remains of whales have yet been found below the chalk. Animals, then, that are separated, geologically, by millions of years, are by this writer created on the same day.

He further states, in the twenty-fifth and twenty-sixth verses, that God created beasts, cattle, creeping things, and men, on the same day, though the geologist knows that they did not appear in this order, and are separated by immense periods. Creeping things, or reptiles, are found as low as the base of the carboniferous formation; but cattle do not make their appearance till the tertiary period, nor man till near its close.

The Bible teaches, that the first man came into existence less than six thousand years ago; yet we now know that a savage race of hunters wandered through the woods of France, Germany, and England, chasing elephants, rhi-

noceroses, and bears, of species now extinct, and were themselves chased by lions, tigers, and hyenas, of species equally extinct, at a time so far distant, that Lyell, one of the most careful as he is one of the most reliable geologists, does not presume, as he says, to place it at less than a hundred thousand years ago. The fact that man has existed for more than six thousand years is now generally acknowledged by both geologists and archeologists. Dr. Nott, in "Indigenous Races" (page 354), says, "It is proven beyond dispute, from the venerable monuments of Egypt, that the races of men, of all colors, now seen around the Mediterranean, inhabited the same countries, with their present physical characteristics, full five thousand years ago," which is long before the birth of Moses or Noah. Nothing can be much plainer than that these various races of men, of different colors, existing five thousand years ago, were entirely unknown to the Bible-writers, or they never would have placed Adam so near our own time, or represented all mankind as having descended from Noah, who was saved in the ark, according to the Bible, a little more than four thousand years ago.

The Bible teaches, that there was no rain upon the earth till after the creation of every plant of the field, and every herb (Gen. ii. 5). All geologists know that this is incorrect; for we find impressions of raindrops in both Silurian and Devonian rocks, laid down before plants and herbs of the field had an existence.

—The Bible's errors of omission are as great as its errors of commission. It says nothing of the original fiery condition of the globe; makes no statement of the law of progress, so observable in the testimony of the rocks; and gives no hint of the millions of species of plants and animals that have become extinct. There is nothing said of the constant interchange of sea and land; but David, in opposition to this well-known fact, tells us, that God has set bounds to the sea, that the waves may not pass over (Ps. civ. 9); and Jeremiah declares, that the Lord has placed the sand for the bound of the sea, by a perpetual decree, and that the waves cannot pass over it (Jer. v. 22). In short, there is nothing said that would indicate that God had any thing to do with the Bible, and every thing to show that its writers were, on scientific subjects, very ignorant men.

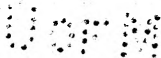


## THE BIBLE SHOULD AGREE WITH ITSELF.

If God has written a book to be the universal guide of man, to teach him what to do and what not to do to deliver him from death and exalt him to everlasting bliss, we may reasonably expect that one part will perfectly agree with another; or how, if our guide points in different directions, shall we be able to know the way we should go? If God is the same in all ages, man's nature the same, and the laws of right eternally the same, the Bible, to be his word, should certainly teach the unvarying right and true from one end to the other. Let us see whether the Bible possesses this essential element of consistency.

"God is a spirit" (John iv. 24). "No man hath seen God at any time" (John i. 18). "Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen nor can see" (1 Tim. vi. 16). "There shall no man see me and live" (Ex. xxxiii. 20). What language can more strongly state the fact, that God is invisible and always has been? But Jacob says, "I have seen God face to face" (Gen. xxxii. 30). "Then went up Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and they saw the God of Israel" (Ex. xxiv. 9, 10). "They died then." No such thing: the writer expressly informs us in the next verse, that "they saw God, and did eat and drink." Micaiah, the prophet of the Lord, says, "I saw the Lord sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing by him on his right hand and on his left" (1 Kings xxii. 19). Isaiah had a similar experience, "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." But no evil seems to have befallen him in consequence.

We learn from Eph. iv. 6, that God is omnipresent. "One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." And, again, in Jer. xxiii. 24, "Do not I fill heaven and earth?" I turn over to Gen. xi. 5, and read, "The Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded." He was not there, then, till he went down.



## 10 COMMON SENSE THOUGHTS ON THE BIBLE.

I am taught in Heb. iv. 13, that God is omniscient, "All things are naked and open to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." "He needs not that any one should inform him of what is transpiring at a distance: he can never be the victim of false reports." But you cannot be sure, till you have read every other passage in the Bible; for in Gen. xviii. 20, we read, "And the Lord said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous, I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know." God acknowledges that the reports he has received may be false, and that the journey is necessary to enable him to determine.

In Deut. xiii. 3, we read, "The Lord our God proveth you, to know whether ye love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul." It is evident, then, that this Jewish Jehovah does not know all things, and that he has to use means to find out what he is ignorant of.

In Gen. ix. 16, God says to Noah, "I do set my bow in the clouds, that I may remember the covenant between me and thee." Here is the God who knows all things, setting a bow in the clouds, *that he may remember!* And, since the bow must have been in the clouds millions of years before that time, how could he then have set it, and and how could that help him to remember?

Peter says (Acts x. 34), "I perceive that God is no respecter of persons." But Paul assures us, that God does respect persons, and that, even before they are born. "For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth; it was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." How could a being that had no respect to persons hate an unborn child? This hatred appears to have extended to him during his life; for, through Malachi (i. 3), God says, "I hated Esau, and laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness." If the true God is no respecter of persons, nothing can be more certain than that the God of the Bible is not that true God. He chooses the Jews out of all races, delivers them from

bondage by miracle, gives them his laws, and inspires their prophets; he feeds them with bread from heaven; when they need water, Moses strikes the flinty rock, and out it pours in a stream; when they arrive at Canaan, by the command of God they slay the people, or make slaves of them, and take possession of the vineyards they never planted, and houses they never built. They are his "peculiar people," his "chosen people," blessed Jews; the rest of the world, cursed Gentiles, fit only to be killed when in the way of God's people, or, if kept alive, to be slaves, they and their children, an inheritance for their Jewish slaveholders forever.

Does God ever become fatigued? No, never: what a question to ask! "The Creator of the ends of the earth fainteth not, neither is weary."

Yes, he certainly did at one time; for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed" (Ex. xxxi. 17). Does God ever repent, or change his mind? That is impossible; for it would argue imperfection in his knowledge, and it is contrary to these plain passages: "God is not a man, that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent" (Num. xxiii. 19). "I am the Lord; I change not" (Mal. iii. 6). "The Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James i. 17).

Yes, God does frequently repent, and change his mind; for "it repented the Lord that he had made man upon the earth, and it grieved him at his heart" (Gen. vi. 6). The Israelites on one occasion offended God, and he said unto Moses, "Let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them; and I will make of thee a great nation." But, after Moses had expostulated with him, it is said, "The Lord repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people" (Ex. xxxii. 10, 14). Again: we find God telling Eli, "I said, indeed, that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me forever; but now the Lord saith, Be it far from me: for them that honor me I will honor, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed" (1 Sam. ii 30). In man, this would be called lying; in a God who knows all things from the beginning, what shall we call it? In Jer. xv. 6, we read that God says, nor wonder that he says it, "I am weary with repenting."

## 12 COMMON SENSE THOUGHTS ON THE BIBLE.

A more contradictory book than the Bible does not probably exist. It teaches us that we are to demand "an eye for an eye, wound for wound, stripe for stripe;" but it teaches us, also, to "resist not evil," and to love our enemies. We may spend our money "for wine, or for strong drink," or whatsoever our souls desire; for God told the Israelites that they might (Deut. xiv. 26). But we are at the same time to remember that "wine is a mocker," and "strong drink is raging" (Prov. xx. 1). We are not even to look upon it, lest we should be tempted to indulge; yet we are to "give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts. Let him drink," says this double-tongued guide, "and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more." We must remember the sabbath day to keep it holy, and we must remember that Paul says, "One man esteemeth one day above another, another regardeth every day alike; let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind." We must not be angry, for "anger rests in the bosom of fools;" but we learn from the same record that "God is angry with the wicked every day." We are to consider the ant, which, having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest (though, by the way, the ant does no such thing), and, at the same time, we are to take no thought for our life what we shall eat, drink, or wear, we are to "labor not for the meat that perisheth" (John vi. 27), "lay not up for ourselves treasures on earth (Matt. vi. 19), and "take no thought for to-morrow" (Matt. vi. 34). To believe the Bible we should believe what no sane mind can believe; and to obey it we should have to do what no person can possibly accomplish, any more than he can be bodily present in two different places at the same moment of time.

SINCE GOD IS GOOD, AND DELIGHTS IN GOODNESS, HIS WORD SHOULD CONTAIN NO COMMANDS THAT ARE BAD: IT SHOULD ENCOURAGE NOTHING THAT IS WICKED, BUT INVARIABLY INCULCATE TRUTH AND RIGHTEOUSNESS.

While there are in the Bible many good moral precepts, though not a whit superior to those we find in the writings of men we style pagans, there is, at the same time, much

that could never proceed from a God of goodness, purity, and love. No Attila, who was entitled the "Terror of the World," ever gave more cruel and blood-thirsty commands than this Bible attributes to God. Read the twentieth chapter of Deuteronomy, beginning at the eleventh verse. If the Israelites went against a city, and the inhabitants made peace with them, then all the people became their tributaries; but if they did not make peace, when it was conquered, they were to kill every male, and save the women and the little ones for themselves; in other words make slaves of them. This was the most generous provision made. "But," God adds, "of the cities of these people, which the Lord thy God doth give thee for an inheritance, thou shalt save alive nothing that breatheth." They march into Canaan with the grand charter of death: the people have been guilty of the terrible crime of living in the land which God had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and they must suffer the extreme penalty of the bloody law. Thus we are told, that, when Jericho was taken, "they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, with the edge of the sword." The only exception was Rahab the harlot, and her family, who is praised, both in New Testament and Old, because she hid the Jewish spies, and lied to save the men who led the wretches that butchered the inhabitants of her city, to whom she gave no word of warning. What enlightened mind can believe that God employed one portion of his children to butcher another portion, — men, women, and unoffending children? Did the Spirit of the universe ever, by his command, turn his children into murderers and fiends, destroying cities, and sparing neither age nor sex? It is infinitely more likely that a cruel Jewish general told this false story to stimulate his soldiers, than that God ever gave any such commands.

I may be told that earthquakes destroy multitudes, and spare neither age nor sex. True: but, in them, the philosopher sees the operation of natural law, the inevitable results of a cooling globe, more destructive before man came on the earth than they are now; and hence never to be classed with inhuman butcheries perpetrated by direct command.

In Judges xiv. 19, it is written, "The Spirit of the Lord came upon Samson, and he went down to Ashkelon, and

slew thirty men, and took their spoil, and gave changes of garments unto them which had expounded his riddle." It appears that Samson, on the occasion of his marriage, made a feast, and, at the feast, put forth a riddle to thirty young men who attended it. If they could not discover the riddle, they were to give him thirty sheets, and thirty changes of garments; and, if they did discover it, he was to give them thirty sheets, and thirty changes of garments. Through the connivance of his wife, they discovered his riddle: then the Spirit of the Lord came upon Samson, and he murdered and robbed thirty men to obtain the sheets and garments necessary to pay his foolish bet. If God is love, as this book says, the Spirit of God must be a spirit of love: how, then, could Samson, under its influence, slay thirty men, innocent and unoffending as they appear to have been? Suppose a man in the present day makes a bet of thirty Indian robes that he will accomplish some feat, and, failing to do it, goes over to the Indian Territory, slays thirty men, and steals their robes to pay his bet, and, when taken up and imprisoned for the murder, tells us that the Spirit of God inspired him to commit the act! Who could believe him? He would be regarded as a wicked wretch, guilty of murder in killing these men, and of blasphemy in fathering the deed upon God.

In Judges xv. 14-20, we are told that the "Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon Samson, . . . and he found a new jaw-bone of an ass, and put forth his hand and took it, and slew a thousand men therewith. . . . And he was sore athirst; and he called on the Lord, and said, Thou hast given this great deliverance into the hand of thy servant; and now shall I die for thirst, and fall into the hand of the uncircumcised? But God clave a hollow place that was in the jaw, and there came water thereout; and, when he had drunk, his spirit came again, and he revived." Supposing that it took Samson one minute to slay each man, and it could scarcely have taken less with such an unsuitable weapon, there was then nearly seventeen hours of blood and murder without a moment's intermission. And now the sun's last rays gild the distant hills, and soon night will hide the horrible scene. There, on the plain, stands Samson, his long hair streaming in the evening breeze, his robe stiff with human gore: the bloody jaw is still in his hand, half worn with repeated blows; while around lie the bodies of

his thousand victims, cold, stiff, and ghastly. He views them with a fiendish smile, and then exultingly exclaims, "Heaps upon heaps! With the jaw-bone of an ass have I slain a thousand men."

But his long-continued and hard labor has made him thirsty. His tongue cleaves to the roof of his mouth; he looks on every side for water, but in vain; he must die, unless deliverance speedily comes. At this moment, he remembers whose servant he is, and by whose arm he has accomplished the mighty deed; and he kneels to pray. To pray? Yes, to pray. To whom, Mars or Jupiter? or is he a Devil worshipper, about to offer his supplications to the dark god of evil, who has assisted him in this fiendish work? No: he prays to the God of mercy, truth, and love, the Christian's God, who inspired Jesus to say, "Be ye merciful as your Father in heaven is merciful," and "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." And God hears the prayers of this faithful servant of his, and causes water to spring out of the gory jaw-bone, that Samson's strength may be renewed for future labors!

In the passage of the children of Israel from Egypt to Canaan, they came in contact with the Midianites, who appear, from Num. xxv., to have converted many of them to their form of religion: so that the followers of Jehovah bowed themselves before the Midianite gods. Moses represents Jehovah as becoming, in consequence, extremely angry; and, in Num. xxxi., we are told that God commanded Moses to war against them. A thousand men of each tribe were appointed, who went up against Midian, slew all the males, burnt all the cities, and took all the spoil, and brought them to the camp. As they return, Moses and all the princes of the congregation go out to meet them. See Moses, as he looks upon the returning army, his sunburnt cheek flushed with anger. "Here comes Moses," whisper the captains to each other. "How angry he looks! What have we done? Have we gone beyond our commission? In the heat of battle, have we killed when we should have saved alive, and burnt and destroyed when we should have preserved? and does this meekest man's heart rise with indignation against us for our cruelty?" On comes the victorious host; a troop of broken-hearted mothers, whose husbands and brothers have been slain, their terrified children, holding their hands and clinging to their garments,

follow in the rear. Striding fiercely up to them, the man of God thunders in their astonished ears, "Have ye saved all the women alive? Now, therefore, kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman that hath known man by lying with him; but all the women children keep alive for yourselves." Even the stony-hearted and bloody-handed Israelitish captains tremble as they hear the brutal command of their leader. There stand, trembling, the widowed mothers and fatherless children, interpreting the looks of their conquerors; and even the Israelite butchers weep as they plunge their swords, red with the blood of their fathers and husbands, into the innocent infants and helpless mothers, and drag off thirty-two thousand unsullied maidens for themselves, reserved for a fate worse by far than death. Talk of blasphemy: what blasphemy can equal that of the men who have palmed upon humanity such stories as these in the name of God?

According to the writer of the Book of Judges (Judg. xx.), "the children of Israel went up to the house of God, and asked counsel of him, saying, Which of us shall go up first to battle against the children of Benjamin? And the Lord said, Judah shall go up first." Judah went up according to the counsel of the Lord; but, instead of conquering their enemies, they were discomfited, and twenty-two thousand of them slain. Sore wept the children of Israel. "Did we not wrong in fighting against Benjamin our brother? Let us return to our homes; but first we will inquire of the Lord," "Shall I go up again to battle against the children of Benjamin, my brother, or shall I cease? And the Lord said, Go up against him." In the second contest, Benjamin slew eighteen thousand of them. With heart-rending sobs and lamentations, the people again inquire of the Lord, "Shall I yet again go out to battle against the children of Benjamin, my brother, or shall I cease? And the Lord said, Go, I will deliver them into thy hand." With this assurance, they went up again, and, by placing a part of the army in ambush, they surprised the Benjamites, and slew twenty-five thousand. Thus, in these three battles, these chosen people of God, by his direct command, slew of each other no less than sixty-five thousand men; and the people on whose side God was lost fifteen thousand more than the other.

In 1 Sam. xv., we are told that Samuel said to Saul,



"Thus saith the Lord of hosts, I remember that which Amalek did to Israel; how he laid wait for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt. Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not, but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass." Because their ancestors, more than three hundred years before, had troubled Israel, these their innocent descendants are to be murdered in cold blood, infants and sucklings too. Think of it, mothers! It would be just as likely, and just as right, for God to command the people of the United States to murder every man, woman, and child among the Indians, on account of some injury done by them to the Spaniards under Columbus. Would a Christian minister telling such a story to-day be credited by any intelligent man? And why should we believe it any sooner because it happened three thousand years ago, and a cruel Jewish priest tells the story?

Looking at these things with minds divested of the prejudices caused by early false training, we are shocked at the horrible atrocities perpetrated, as we are informed, by the express command of Jehovah. If any being ever gave any such commands, that would be evidence sufficient that he was unworthy of reverence. So a Christian would think of a Hindoo book: why not of a Hebrew?

#### THE WORK OF GOD SHOULD BE REASONABLE.

The Bible believer regards God as the Author of reason: his word to man cannot, therefore, be contrary to reason. It may, we will allow, reveal that concerning which we can have no other means of ascertaining the truth, and, in this respect, be above our reason; but all its statements that can be understood must exactly harmonize with what the reason affirms. No man can be as sure that any book is inspired by God as he is sure that his reason is from God: hence whatever is contrary to what he is certain, came from God, he is safe in rejecting. Reason is the test to try all things by: what will not bear its scrutiny is worthless. Reason is the balance: put ascertained truth in the one scale, and the currency thou wishest to examine in the other, and whatever thou findest light cast fearlessly away; its possession may prevent thee from obtaining the sterling coin of heaven.

In Gen. ii., we are told, that, after God had created the heavens and the earth in six days, he rested on the sev-

## 18 COMMON SENSE THOUGHTS ON THE BIBLE.

enth day. And in Exod. xxxi. we are again told that "he rested and was refreshed." How unreasonable to suppose that God was ever tired with labor, and that he rested and refreshed himself by ceasing to labor! When did God cease to work? Who kept the universe in motion while he rested? How low and childish must have been the idea of God in the mind of the man who wrote such an account as that!

It is altogether unreasonable to suppose that God placed the destiny of the human race in the hands of one pair, and made the future weal or woe of unborn millions to depend upon their eating or abstaining from the fruit of a certain tree in a garden. What had I to do with the eating of that fruit? Why should I be cursed, or the ground be cursed to me, on account of Adam and Eve's disobedience, several thousand years ago? The fact is, that no such curse exists; and the story regarding it can only be regarded as a fable. Geology proves that death was in the world millions of ages before man dwelt here. Carnivorous animals lived, and preyed upon their helpless victims in the world's young days, as they do now.

How unreasonable it is to suppose that God made coats of skins, and clothed Adam and Eve (Gen. iii. 21), and that he made the Egyptian midwives houses! (Exod. i. 21.) Since man is endowed with constructiveness, and material abounds everywhere, God, doubtless, left them to make their own coats, and build their own houses.

The Bible informs us, that, on account of the exceeding sinfulness of the people living upon the earth, "he repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart:" so that he swept off man and beast and creeping thing, — all that lived, except Noah, and his family, and they that were with him in the ark, by whom the world was repopled. Is it reasonable to suppose that God destroyed mankind and all animated beings, because it repented him that he had made them, and then saved several individuals from the old stock, and peopled the world again with men who were just as likely to grieve him as the antediluvians had done? What should we think of a gardener who had an apple-tree that grieved him on account of the sourness of the fruit, so that he determined to destroy it, but, before doing so, cut off several scions to insert in other stocks, that so this bad fruit might

have a chance to become good? Or what should we think of a man who destroyed a machine because it did not answer the purpose for which it was made, and then made another resembling the former in every respect? We should not give either of them much credit for wisdom; and shall we believe that God acted thus foolishly? Is it likely, indeed, that God should be angry, and grieved at his heart, about what he knew from the beginning, — the natural consequence of his own plans, foreknown, and therefore fore-ordained from the beginning?

The account of the deluge is unreasonable throughout, and bears on its face all the marks of a fable. There is not water on the earth, in the earth, nor above the earth, to cover it to the tops of the highest mountains. If all the moisture in the atmosphere was precipitated on the earth, it would not make a sheet a foot thick; so say the best authorities. The ark, taking the largest proposed measurement, was a box five hundred and fifty feet long, ninety-one feet eight inches broad, and fifty-five feet high. Into this were to be taken seven of every kind of bird; and, since there are 6,266 birds, there must have been 43,862 birds, or nearly three for every square yard of standing-room. Of beasts there would be over five thousand, of reptiles nine hundred and fourteen, of insects a million and a half, and of land snails nine thousand two hundred. Then think of the food for these animals for one year and ten days, the time they were in the ark, — hay for the herbivorous animals (a moderate calculation shows they would require three thousand five hundred tons, which alone would take up two-thirds of the ark's capacity); grain for thousands of birds, rodents, and other animals; flesh for lions, tigers, leopards, ounces, wild-cats, wolves, bears, hyenas, jackals, dogs, and foxes, eagles, condors, vultures, buzzards, falcons, hawks, kites, owls, crocodiles, and serpents, nearly every one of which would eat its weight in a month; fish for pelicans, gulls, storks, cormorants, herons, spoon-bills, penguins, albatrosses, fish-hawks, and king-fishers; fruit for four hundred and forty-two monkeys, plantain-eaters, fruit-pigeons, toucans, parrots, paroquets, cockatoos, and hosts of others; insects for goat-suckers, swallows, swifts, martins, shrikes, bee-eaters, orioles, sparrows, trogons, and jacamars, moles, shrews, hedgehogs, ant-eaters, aard-varks, and pangolins.

Supposing that all the animals could be collected from every continent and every large island on the globe, and food of all kinds gathered for them, how could eight persons attend to the mighty host? Each person, women included, must have fed, cleaned, and watered every day 5,482 birds, 645 beasts, 114 reptiles, 1,150 land-snails, and 187,500 insects.

How did they live without light in two of the stories, since there was only one window? and how could they breathe when that window was closed, and "God had shut them in"?

After they left the ark, we are told that Noah offered burnt offerings on an altar which he built; "and the Lord smelled a sweet savor, and the Lord said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth: neither will I again smite every living thing as I have done." Is it reasonable to suppose that the smell of a roasted beast was pleasing to God? The reason God gives for destroying the earth is, that "every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually;" yet now he gives that very reason for not destroying the earth again. If it was a good reason for not destroying the earth again, why was it not a good reason for preventing its destruction?

It is unreasonable to suppose that God had to look on the rainbow, that he might remember his covenant with Noah (Gen. ix. 16); or to suppose that he hardened Pharaoh's heart, and then punished him and millions of innocent people, because he was hard-hearted; or that he plagued another Pharaoh and his house with great plagues, they being entirely innocent, and permitted Abram and his wife, who were the guilty parties, to go unpunished. (Gen. xii.)

In Num. xiv. 11-20, we are informed that God was angry with the Jews, because they believed the ten spies who brought back an evil report of the land of Canaan, rather than the two who brought back a good report. And the Lord said unto Moses, "I will smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them, and will make of thee a greater nation, and mightier, than they. And Moses said unto the Lord, Then the Egyptians shall hear it, . . . and they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land. . . . Now, if thou shalt kill all this people as one man, then the nations

which have heard the fame of thee will speak, saying, Because the Lord was not able to bring this people into the land which he swore unto them, therefore he hath slain them in the wilderness." It appears that Moses succeeded in appeasing Jehovah by these appeals to his love of approbation; and he concludes that he will not destroy them as he had previously proposed. How very likely for some knave to tell such a story, and thus increase his importance among the people! but how exceedingly unreasonable to believe that the soul of the universe could ever be moved by such contemptible appeals!

Is it reasonable to suppose that God ever instituted such a cruel, useless, and indecent rite as circumcision, and ordered every one to be killed on whom it was not practised; or that the Israelites multiplied from seventy persons to about three millions in two hundred and fifteen years; or, that 4,538,480,640 cubic yards of quails fell round the Jewish camp to supply the people with flesh (Num. xi. 31)? — a quantity sufficient to make a wall round the world eighty feet high and twelve feet thick!

Is it reasonable to believe that God moved David to number Israel, and then, because he did so, slew 70,000 people (2 Sam. xxiv.); or that God slew 50,070 men in an obscure village, because they looked into an old box called an ark (1 Sam. vi.); or that one man slew a thousand with no other weapon than a jaw-bone; or that God ever said that a liar, thief, adulterer, and murderer had kept his commandments, and followed him with all his heart; doing only that which was right in his eyes (1 Kings xiv. 8); and that a man whose life was stained with the foulest crimes never turned aside from any thing that God commanded him all his life, save once (1 Kings xv. 5)?

Is it reasonable that people should take no thought for their life as to what they shall eat, drink, or wear; no thought for the morrow; that they should judge no one, and give to every man that asks of them? Is it reasonable to suppose that God was made flesh, became a puling infant in his mother's arms, helped his father at his business, commenced to preach when he was about thirty years of age, and soon afterward allowed the Jews to crucify him? These things are taught in the Bible. They are unreasonable: can we do otherwise than conclude that the Bible is entirely of human origin?

## 22 COMMON SENSE THOUGHTS ON THE BIBLE.

### THE WORD OF GOD SHOULD BE PURE.

If the Bible came from a God of purity and holiness, to teach men to be pure and holy, there should be nothing in it impure, nothing vulgar, nothing that would tend to debase the mind and brutalize the man. If the Bible had been God's book, and intended by him to be in the hands of all, he certainly would have made it fit for all to read: but many parts of the Bible are filthy, indecent; many of the examples placed before the reader, without note or comment, are totally unfit to put into the hands of young persons, to say the least, and, were they in any other book, a decent man would be ashamed for it to be seen in his house. What can be more disgusting than the conduct of Lot and his daughters, after leaving Sodom: and if true, which is very unlikely, what possible benefit can we derive from reading the statement! The account of Tamar and Judah, many of the stories in the lives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, those old Jewish cattle-raisers, and who seem to have partaken of the nature of the brutes they reared, would never be tolerated in any modern book; and any man writing similar stories now would be regarded as a miscreant. There are few writings more thoroughly sensual than the book called Solomon's Song; and yet credulous orthodoxy sees in it beautiful references to Christ and his Church. By putting spiritual meanings into the words of Don Juan, it might as consistently be placed among writings divinely inspired.

### THE WORD OF GOD SHOULD CONTAIN NOTHING TRIFLING OR TEMPORARY.

If God had written, or inspired men to write, a book which should be man's guide to happiness and heaven in all future ages, is it not reasonable to expect to find it filled with the most important truths, and nothing but what is of universal benefit? But how much of the Bible is occupied with trifling matters, that are of no importance to any one, and a great deal more with what might have been important to the Jews, but does not in the least concern us? Look at the long and conflicting genealogies; the chapters filled with the names of obscure villages, of no more importance to us than the names of the Choctaw villages of a thousand years

ago; the dreadful accounts of rapine and murder, and the numerous gossiping stories, with which the Old Testament and some of the New abounds. Of what use is it to us to know how the tabernacle was built, how many curtains were made for it, and what were the length and breadth of them, and what ceremonies attended its dedication? — descriptions of which occupy ten whole chapters, six long verses being devoted to a single candlestick. How much better are we for knowing the fashion of the clothes worn by Aaron and his sons, the coats, girdles, bonnets, and breeches so carefully enumerated? The lives of the flies that buzzed around the Israelitish encampment would be quite as valuable. Such petty details might suit the cramped minds of a semi-barbarous nation; but what world-wide use or beauty is there in them, that they should be regarded by intelligent persons of the present day as divine oracles?

Men have preached, it is true, from “old shoes and clouted,” and no doubt their admiring congregation received spiritual nourishment from the mouldy fare; and I dare say Aaron’s breeches might serve as a suitable heading for other spiritual discourses: but such passages are like “Dame Waddle’s teapot,” they can only pour out as much as has been poured in.

What should we think of a college professor who spent a large portion of his time in teaching the young men committed to his charge to make mud-pies, to play at marbles, and fly paper kites? Yet he would be a philosopher, compared with the Jewish Jehovah, who, writing a book to be the complement of Nature, a guide to men in all ages in reference to their most important interests, takes up so great a portion of it with filthy stories, that no decent woman can listen to without blushing; rambling tales, in which we can find no good moral; lives of bigoted priests, heartless tyrants, and shameless women; long lists of hard-to-pronounce and useless names, and dark, enigmatical passages, that mean any thing or nothing. Take a specimen from Isaiah, the “evangelical prophet.” (Is. vii. 17.) The Lord speaking to Ahaz, king of Judah, says, “The Lord shall bring upon thee, and upon thy people, and upon thy father’s house, days that have not come, from the day that Ephraim departed from Judah; even the king of Assyria.” It is very difficult to tell what this means, and especially the last clause; but what follows is still darker. “And it shall come

to pass in that day" (what day?) "that the Lord shall hiss for the fly that is in the uttermost part of the rivers of Egypt, and for the bee that is in the land of Assyria. And they shall come, and shall rest, all of them, in the desolate valleys, and in the holes of the rocks, and upon all thorns, and upon all bushes. In the same day" (what day, we ask again?) "shall the Lord shave" (the Lord shave! himself, or some one else?) "with a razor that is hired, namely, by them beyond the river," (does this mean that God will shave by them beyond the river, or that he will hire the razor by them beyond the river?) "by the king of Assyria," (worse and worse: do those beyond the river hire the razor by the king of Assyria, or does God shave with the hired razor by them, and they shave by the king of Assyria? Who can tell? But we will read on) "the head, and the hair of the feet: and it shall also consume the beard." A razor might be made to shave the head, it could not properly be said to consume the beard, though we may tolerate the expression when made by a poet like Isaiah; but what are we to think of shaving the hair of the feet? "And it shall come to pass in that day" (what a wonderful day that must be!) "that a man shall nourish a young cow and two sheep; and it shall come to pass, for the abundance of milk that they shall give, he shall eat butter; for butter and honey shall every one eat that is left in the land." Who can be benefited by reading such riddles? You may say the translators failed to give the meaning of the original: then the question arises, Why did God, after writing the Bible correctly, allow blundering translators to spoil the work, and make nonsense of important, eternal truths?

There is that in the Bible which is true and right; that which is in agreement with man's nature, and which it will be his duty and interest to perform as long as he exists: but how small a part is this of the whole? certainly not the one-twentieth; and this mixed up with so much that is temporary, false, foolish, indecent, and wicked, that its value is in a great measure destroyed.

#### THE WORD OF GOD SHOULD BE PLAIN.

A book made by God to be a guide in the most important matters to young and old, learned and unlearned, should be written in the plainest possible manner, that all might understand and obey. As that only can build up the body



which is digested by the stomach, so that only can benefit the mind which is received by the understanding. The ignorant belief of a book full of mysteries can benefit no one. But the Bible contains a great deal that the most of people cannot understand, and not a little that no one can understand.

Take the Book of Revelation, for instance : hundreds of persons have written comments upon it, and yet no two appear to agree as to its meaning, — a proof that it is any thing but plain. One supposes that it reveals the history of the Christian Church to the end of the world ; another, that it refers to the destruction of Jerusalem, and the wars of the Romans. Protestants think that it points, in the very plainest manner, to the Roman antichrist and the final destruction of popery ; while the Catholic is equally certain that it refers to the antichrist Luther and the final destruction of Protestantism. The greatest portion of Ezekiel is a cloud of thick darkness, that the mind's eye seeks in vain to penetrate ; and Isaiah is not much better. Both abound with passages capable of many interpretations, and every man can give them such a one as best suits him. Peter says of "Brother Paul's Epistles," that there are some things in them hard to be understood ; and, if Brother Paul had read Peter's Epistles, he might have found some things in them equally as hard to be understood. In fact, excepting the historical parts of the Bible, a great proportion of it is dark and mysterious, and comparatively little of it plain, and easy to be understood. Hence we have a thousand contending sects and parties, each professing to make the Bible its guide, yet all satisfied that the rest are wrong. New sects are constantly rising, each different from all preceding, yet all professing to be guided by the same clear, plain, infallible book.

The Bible is so dark, that it reflects the image of every sect professing to be based upon its teachings. The Methodist looks therein, and sees the religious system of John Wesley, in all its goodly proportions ; the Presbyterian sees his partial, cruel deity, and the everlasting damnation of all but the chosen few ; the Universalist, the eternal felicity of all ; the Quaker finds his plain language and the indwelling spirit that will lead him into all truth : in short, every one sees the image of his own belief, as in a mirror, and persuades himself that he alone is right. If the Bible was not

obscure, there could not be this world-wide difference of opinion among honest, well-meaning men, as thousands of sectarians are.

**THE WORD OF GOD SHOULD BE PERFECT AND UNALTERABLE.**

It would be of little use for us to know that the Bible had been God's book once: it must be so now. It should not only have been perfect when first penned, but so perfect, that it could not become imperfect. What advantage would it be for me to know that God had written a book, but that the men into whose hands it passed had, either by carelessness or design, left out a number of God's words, and I did not know what they were, nor how many, and that they had also added words of their own, and I had no certain means of knowing them either?

Is it likely that God would cause a book to be written, containing the most important truths, on which the destiny of millions should hang, and then allow it to be tampered with in this way? Yet the books of the Bible have been thus dealt with. All commentators allow that passages have been added. Some speak of whole chapters, which formed no part of the original record. The Scriptures themselves quote passages, and refer to books, as of equal authority, of whose existence, otherwise, we know nothing; for instance, "the Book of the Wars of the Lord" (Num. xxi. 14), "the Book of Jasher" (2 Sam. i. 18), and "the Book of Nathan the Prophet, the Prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite, and the Visions of Iddo the Seer" (2 Chron. ix. 29). Sir Isaac Newton, Adam Clarke, Albert Barnes, and nearly all commentators, agree that the seventh verse of the fifth chapter of the 1st Epistle of John is an interpolation. Clarke, though a zealous Trinitarian, says, "Of all manuscripts yet discovered which contain this epistle, amounting to one hundred and twelve, three only, two of which are of no authority, have the text." Yet multitudes read this passage, and quote it, having no breath of suspicion that it is a base forgery. How many such passages exist, which we have no means of discovering! Theodore Beza, the successor of Calvin, who published a Greek New Testament, frankly declared that he did not hesitate, in his translation of the Scriptures, to often correct the apostles, because they did not know what they were talking about. Yet his Greek

Testament was taken as the basis of our authorized English New Testament. There is no copy of any book of the Bible existing as written by its original author; nor have we any reason to suppose that we have any first, or even tenth hand copy from the original book. The oldest that we have, about thirteen hundred years old, are many removes from the originals, and blundered at every remove. No man could copy the whole New Testament without blundering. Several of the old manuscripts are so worn and damaged, that only small portions can be read. Did God leave his word at the mercy of damp, mould, and nibbling mice? John Mills collected thirty thousand readings of the New Testament alone: the question is, Which is correct? which did God dictate? Who shall decide? If we believed in an infallible pope, the matter might be easily decided. When men imagine they are led by God, and trusting in his word, it may be the word of some designing knave, or concocter of pious frauds, of whom, as Mosheim, the ecclesiastical historian, informs us, there were multitudes, soon after Christ's ascension, who wrote gospels and epistles, forging the names of apostles and other illustrious characters to give them currency.

King James's Bible, the one now in common use, was published in 1611; but, in 1711, it was corrected by Bishops Tenison and Lloyds; thousands of errors having crept into it. In 1769, Dr. Blayney corrected a multitude of new errors, reformed the text in many places, and rectified some material errors in chronology. More recently, "the British and Foreign Bible Society, after having circulated millions of copies of it, have declared that a faithful examination of it gives rise to serious doubts whether it can be truthfully called the word of God."\* In 1847, the American Bible Society appointed a committee of its members to prepare a standard edition of King James's version, free from typographical errors. They prepared such an edition, correcting, as they stated, twenty-four thousand errors; but, alarmed at the attacks made upon it, it was withdrawn: and the American Bible Society continues to this day to circulate for the word of God a book having in it twenty-four thousand acknowledged errors.

\* Address of Dr. T. S. Bell before the Bible Revision Association, 1858.

**THE WORD OF GOD SHOULD BE IN THE HANDS OF ALL.**

Is it necessary to our comfort and well-being that we should see? then the world is bathed in light; and the soul lives not that it does not bless. Food is needed for the sustenance of our bodies: it springs out of the ground; it swims in the water; it flies in the air; it is wide-spread as the globe. Drink is needful: see the clouds distil the choicest nectar; it flows from every mountain, and the universal earth holds it like a sponge, that the wants of all may be supplied.

The well-being of man's body does not depend on chance, or the caprice of another. Has Nature been less mindful of people's souls than of their bodies? Has she made such wonderful, bounteous, and universal provision for the one, and such scanty and inadequate provision for the other? No one pretends that there was any Bible in existence for about three thousand years, during which time millions of human beings must have passed away destitute of all knowledge of this God's book; nor was it till sixteen hundred years after this, that any part of it was known to any other people than the Jews. Even now, the Bible is an unknown book to two-thirds of mankind, notwithstanding the zealous endeavors of its firm believers to spread it wide as the world: then it must follow, either that the Bible is not needful to man's happiness and well-being, or that God is partial and unkind to the greater portion of his children. Had the Bible been from God, its revelations would have been as universal as those of Nature, which come to every human soul.

**THE BIBLE GIVES MEN UNREASONABLE VIEWS OF GOD.**

The Jehovah of the Jews is a magnified man, — half soldier, half saint, yet entirely a Jew. The Old-Testament writers never appear to have regarded him as the Universal Parent, bestowing his blessings equally on all. He was the "God of Israel;" he dwelt in Zion; he was the Lord of their hosts, the fighter of their battles, their champion against the world. The small portion of his family descended from Abraham were his dear children, whom he favored with priests and prophets; while the rest of the world, poor illegitimates, cursed Gentiles, were left to grope their way in thick darkness.

Nor are the views held by Bible believers to-day much better than these. Many believe that God from all eternity has chosen a certain portion of mankind, without any regard to their well or ill doing; that he sent Jesus to die for these, and for no other; and that, in consequence of his death, God will give these chosen ones eternal blessedness, but the rest of mankind, which includes by far the greater number, are left to devouring flames and eternal torment.

Many more believe, that, on account of one man's sin, God causes every child to be born with a sinful nature, continually disposed to evil, and naturally averse to all goodness; and, while in this condition, permits a malignant Devil, with millions of subordinate devils, to do their utmost to keep him in it, and yet, if he continues in that state, dooms him to everlasting fire. They also believe that God could not admit even the righteous to his favor, until his innocent Son had satisfied his justice, and turned away his wrath, by suffering a cruel death. The people who hold these notions believe them to be scriptural: they quote passages in proof of their truth; and there is no doubt that many parts of the Bible do strongly favor such horrible ideas. A man whose character was as bad as that attributed by the orthodox to God would be considered too vile to live.

I am told that the Bible teaches that God is love, and that he is just, merciful, kind, and that his tender mercies are over all his works. Certainly it does: but it also teaches that "the Lord is a man of war," and a "consuming fire;" that he is "angry with the wicked every day;" and that "he will have mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth." The God of the Bible commands men to steal and murder, and teaches others to prevaricate, if not to lie; he becomes angry, and swears in his wrath; he can be persuaded and pleased as well as offended by man, and is thus at the mercy of his own creatures. He tells Hosea to take unto him a wife of whoredoms (Hos. i. 1), and after that to love an adulteress, whom he bought unto him. In short, his character as revealed in the Bible is one of the vilest ever presented for the reverence of mankind. No wonder that the people who believe these things have low, unworthy, childish views of God! no wonder that they regard him as the miraculous originator of disease, and believe that he often kills little children because their

parents love them too fondly! No wonder that orthodox people have been so intolerant as to persecute the best men and women to death: the vengeance of their God flameth forever, and the fierce fire of his anger is never quenched. The most excruciating tortures that man can inflict upon man are but as a drop compared to the ocean of his wrath: and, if persecution can save men from that, it is a duty that every Christian should practise, and, generally, they have not been slack in its performance.

It is true that men may be good, and yet believe the Bible to be God's word, and regard it as the rule of their faith and practice; but such persons frequently read it not as it is, but as they think it should be. They give a worthy meaning to many an unworthy passage, and see truth and goodness where neither exists. Having a good thought, they put it into some mystical passage of the Bible, and then take it out again, and exclaim, "What a wonderful book the Bible is!" Is there any thing foolish or contradictory in the Holy Book? "Oh! it does not mean that." Though corruption swims upon the surface, their anointed vision sees virtue lying beneath. Thus do men reconcile impossibilities; thus does the girdle of their faith tie the opposing poles together. Let every one have the same latitude, and the Koran is a God's book, too, replete with holy wisdom; the book of Mormon ceases to be a jumble of absurdities, and on every page sparkles divinest wisdom.

#### IT GIVES MEN FALSE VIEWS OF DUTY.

People are led to imagine that they can please God by spending one-seventh of their time in idleness; by allowing themselves to be dipped in water, or by having it sprinkled in their faces; by washing one another's feet; by telling God how good and great and gracious he is; and by a multitude of other observances, that have in them no virtue whatever, and are, in some cases, decidedly hurtful; as drinking a villanous compound of alcohol in church, and thus giving a holy sanction to the accursed drinking customs of the land. I once heard a reformed drunkard declare that the taste for alcoholic drinks was revived in him by taking wine at the sacrament, and it was the cause of his return to former degrading habits.

Men, in consequence of their belief in the infallible inspiration of the Bible, are led to suppose that God requires

something more of them than being good and doing good, and that religious observances are more important than mental culture and the performance of virtuous actions: thus superstition takes the place of science, and the deductions of reason are set aside for the stupid drivellings of folly. Roman-Catholic countries groan under the accumulated mummeries that have been reared on this foundation.

**IT LEADS PEOPLE TO BELIEVE THAT SIN CAN BE FORGIVEN.**

We are taught in the Scriptures, that, if we repent and believe, God will forgive; though crimsoned with crime, he can wash us white as snow. In agreement with this are the creeds of evangelical churches, their sermons, and their hymns.

A man may live in the daily commission of the blackest crimes, till he is seventy or eighty years of ages, and in five minutes be transmuted into a being of angelic purity; and, should he die the next moment, heaven is his everlasting home. Thus we may sow a lifetime of sin, and reap an eternity of happiness; sow to the flesh, and reap life everlasting. What can be more false and injurious than such a doctrine! It offers a premium to vice. The lifelong criminal who is forgiven is in an infinitely better condition than the moral man who is unforgiven. But I cannot drink intoxicating drinks, and another get drunk for me; I cannot take poison, and another die for me; nor can I put my hand in the fire, and another be burned for me. Where is the evidence that I can sin, and Jesus suffer the penalty due to my guilt? Does the drunkard, who rises from his knees at the revival-meeting, shouting, "Glory be to God! my sins are forgiven," have a new constitution given him at that moment, so that the consequences of his past misdeeds no longer affect him? Is his misspent time made good to him, and his beclouded brain restored to clearness and soundness in a moment? If not, what does forgiveness of sin mean? Does it mean, that if we cease to do evil, and do well, we shall reap the reward of well doing? If so, then all mankind are in a state of forgiveness, and they never were in any other. But sin and suffering go hand in hand, crime and penalty are as cause and effect; and he that teaches any other doctrine teaches what our

every-day experience proves to be false. Not a sin, but hinders us forever: the wound that it makes leaves an eternal scar; and nothing can make it be as though it had never been. The blood of Jesus is as impotent as the blood of a sheep; for the consequences of wrong-doing follow the wrong-doer in consequence of the order of Nature, — an order that is never violated.

**IT HAS MADE MILLIONS MISERABLE BY ITS DOCTRINE OF A MALIGNANT DEVIL AND AN EVERLASTING HELL.**

It teaches the existence of a fiend, whose nature is pure malignity, whose power is second only to that of God himself, and whose constant employment is to draw mankind from virtue to vice, and from happiness to endless misery. It also teaches the existence of a bottomless pit, where sinners are doomed to dwell in everlasting fire. There "the smoke of their torment ascendeth forever," "their worm dieth not, and the fire never shall be quenched." Oh the unutterable anguish, the indescribable torment, that these doctrines have caused to thousands, aye, millions, of the purest and gentlest souls; for such are most impressed by them! Every doubt that crossed their minds respecting the truth of orthodox notions was thought to be a suggestion of the Devil; and the yawning gulf threatened them for every exercise of reason. The conflict thus produced has often resulted in hopeless lunacy. The dread of a future hell has made a present one for multitudes. If none go to hell but the wicked, then hell is empty. If none go to heaven but the righteous, then "heaven's echoing aisles" are as destitute of occupants as the orthodox dogmas are of reason. All men are partly good and partly bad. From the worst man to the best man, there is an infinite gradation. Where, then, can a line be drawn, on one side of which all are to go to eternal torments, and, on the other side, to everlasting happiness? What kind of a being is that who would quench the slumbering fire of virtue that still lives in the worst man's heart? Imagination never painted a blacker devil.

The idea that any soul will ever be placed in a position in which he can never rise, never become wiser, never become better, but must continue in misery forever, is truly horrible, and can hardly be entertained by an intelligent and benevolent mind. How many inherit deficient intel-



lects, and large, active animal propensities from their parents! How many are educated among unfavorable circumstances all their lives, breathing a poisonous moral atmosphere from their birth! And shall these souls be shut out from hope forever? Forbid it, says every charitable soul. And it is forbidden. Nature, that gives all an opportunity here, and continues it through life, will give all an opportunity there, and continue it in the next life.

**THE BIBLE HAS DONE MUCH HARM BY THE DEGRADING POSITION IN WHICH IT PLACES WOMAN.**

The writer of the garden-of-Eden story in Genesis commences the mischief by representing God as cursing the woman by causing man to rule over her. "Thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee." Man, unwilling to allow God's curse to fall to the ground, continues to rule over her to this day. Paul very foolishly swallows the fable, and argues from it, "The head of the woman is the man." "Man is the glory of God; but the woman is the glory of the man." Women "are commanded to be under obedience." "Wives submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord." "As the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husband in every thing" (Eph. v. 22-24). What better character can a tyrannical husband have than that! If woman had been permitted to write her Bible, we should have found some different stories and different commands in it.

How absurd to think that God requires a woman to be subject to her husband in every thing. The wife, a noble matron, thoughtful and wise; the husband, a mean, despicable wretch, whose moral perceptions are drowned in whiskey: and that woman must obey this man, because he is her husband, and that not in some things, but in all things: she is to "submit herself unto him as unto the Lord."

I am told that the Bible says, "Husbands, love your wives." True; but the obedience of the wife is not to depend upon the love of the husband: she must obey him whether he loves or hates her, and whether his commands are in agreement with her sense of right or not. Quarrels innumerable take place in pious families from the attempt of husbands to maintain the unjust authority that the Bible thus gives them.

According to the Mosaic law, so called, if a woman gave birth to a male child, she was to be unclean seven days; but, if a female, she was to be unclean fourteen days. Why this difference? Had it been the contrary, it would have been less unreasonable. If a man went to war, and found among the captives a beautiful woman, he was permitted to make her his wife; and if afterwards he had no delight in her, he was to let her go where she would. No help for the woman if she found no delight in him. If a man married a wife, and was dissatisfied with her, he could give her a writing of divorcement, and send her home. "But, Moses, I am dissatisfied with my husband: he makes my life miserable continually," says the Jewess. "I cannot help it," replies Moses, "the Lord has no message for you." This man-made Jehovah cares but little for woman, and woman should care but little for him.

Paul says, "Let your women keep silence in the churches; for it is not permitted unto them to speak." He tells us, that the man was not created for the woman, but the woman was created for the man, and gives us as a reason why woman "should learn in silence with all subjection," that "Adam was first formed, then Eve" (1 Tim. ii. 13). What a reason! Suppose Adam was made first: am I any better for that? Suppose Eve was made last: is any woman the worse on that account? Horses and dogs, according to the Bible, were made before men: horses should therefore be in the saddle, and men go hunting for the benefit of the dogs. How infatuated those persons must be, who consider such lack of reasoning as this the inspired wisdom of the Universal Soul! But it was the apostle Paul who said this; and multitudes of women listen with admiration, and adoringly kiss the foot that tramples them in the dust. Can any good reason be given why woman should be subject to man, any more than man to woman? Is it not as proper for woman to speak in church as man? Men and women should go hand in hand together, mutually assisting each other, and harmoniously educating their children. When woman's influence is more directly and widely felt in Church and State, the world will be the better for it.

#### THE BIBLE SANCTIONS SLAVERY.

Every person in the United States is heavily taxed to-day in consequence of that sanction. Had it not been for

the indorsement of slavery by the Jewish Jehovah, and its consequent indorsement by nearly the whole Christian Church, we should never have suffered the terrible penalty which slaveholding has entailed upon us as a people.

God's command to the Jews was, "Both thy bondmen and thy bondmaids which thou shalt have shall be of the heathen that are round about you: of them shall ye buy bondmen and bondmaids. And ye shall take them as an inheritance for your children after you, to inherit them for a possession; they shall be your bondmen forever." If a Jew struck one of these bondmen so as to cause his death, if he lingered for a day or two before he died, the Jewish slaveholder was not to be punished. Why? Listen, you that think the Bible does not sanction slavery. "For he is his money" (Ex. xxi. 20, 21). What kind of a spirit dictated the passage that tells us that one man is another man's money?

In the New Testament, servants are commanded to "be obedient to them that are their masters according to their flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as unto Christ" (Eph. vi. 5). We read in Col. iii. 22-24, "Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eye-service, as men-pleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing God." In Tit. ii. 9, "Exhort servants to be obedient unto their own masters, and to please them in all things; not answering again." And in Pet. ii. 18, "Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward." If the slaveholder himself had written the Bible, he could not have inserted any thing better calculated to serve his purpose. Servants are to obey their masters, not in some things, not in right things, but in all things; and that with fear and trembling: yea, with all fear, and not only the good, but the "froward" also.

What becomes of the will and conscience of the servant? Where are his manliness and nobility of soul? Crushed out of him; and he has become the crawling tool of a tyrant, to whom he must be obedient, as unto Christ. It is true that such is not the whole tenor of the Bible: many passages lay the axe at the very root of tyranny; but there is so much of an opposite character, under shelter of which the vilest abominations have been committed!

## THE BIBLE HAS RETARDED THE PROGRESS OF SCIENCE.

The Scriptures have been brought forward to knock down or strangle every new scientific thought. Our orthodox ministers have stood like highwaymen on the road, and called to every new thought, "Your assistance for our cause, or your life!" Science has flourished, not because it had the Bible to help it, but in spite of its direst opposition. Astronomy discovered that the earth is round, and revolves; but 'he Bible taught something widely different: and hence, the astronomer was an infidel, and astronomy a dangerous science. Geology proved the world to be millions of years old, and the wail over its infidelity has not yet subsided. It is well known that man was on the earth ages before the time of the creation of Adam, according to the Bible; but how cautious men are in saying so! and how theologians denounce these who dare to do so, for it is not in agreement with the unknown writer of Genesis! It will be generally acknowledged that universal man is not descended from one pair, and that man had a natural origin: but our scientific men, especially Americans, have a padlock on their lips; and orthodoxy keeps the key.

People have been led to believe that a doctrine is true if taught in the Bible, and false if not taught there, or its opposite taught. Hence passages have been twisted and tortured and turned, till they have cried out the Shibboleths of every party. A day means a year, or a thousand, or an indefinite period of time. Every living thing means a few animals in an obscure valley; and the whole earth means a spot so small that no one can find it.

If the English text cannot readily be made to harmonize with the demands of science, then the dead Greek and longer dead Hebrew are called from their musty graves, and a favorable answer demanded, which is seldom refused. Thousands of men have spent their lives in trying to elucidate mysteries, harmonize contradictions, and make absurdities appear reasonable; while our scientific works are disfigured by constant attempts on the part of their timid writers to reconcile the statements of Nature with the childish stories and wild conceits of the writer of Genesis.

*"The Bible is an infallible guide to happiness. It has made millions happy, and led them on to joys on high; and*

*if all men would believe its teachings, and follow its rules precisely, all moral evil would cease from the earth."*

Will you please to inform us which Bible is this infallible guide? Is it King James's Bible, containing sixty-six books, which was translated by forty-seven Church-of-England priests, after instructions from his "most excellent Majesty?" Is it the Roman-Catholic Bible, in universal use before the Reformation, and which contains seventy-six books? or is it Luther's Bible, which does not contain Revelation? or Boothroyd's, which excludes Solomon's Song? Perhaps it is the Samaritan Bible, which contains the five books of Moses and Joshua; or the Jewish Bible, which, according to Josephus, contains twenty-two books. There are so many Bibles, all differing from each other, that we ought to know which is this infallible guide. Supposing the books that constitute King James's Bible were infallible at first, they cannot be so now: there are as many variations in existing manuscripts of the New Testament as there are words in the book. Who knows which of them is correct, or if any are? Were the English priests infallibly inspired to pick out just the one that was right, and to insert the infallibly true where it was missing?

There is no man living that can obey all the rules of the Bible, nor even of the New Testament. Jesus did not even obey his own teachings; and I never knew a man who tried to obey them for any length of time. And if, in order to be happy, we need to obey the teachings of the Bible, no mortal can be happy. For a man to follow all the rules of the Bible, he must return evil for evil, and in no case return evil for evil; circumcise his children, and yet pay no attention to circumcision; abstain from swine's flesh and things strangled, and yet eat any thing that seems to him good; perform his oaths, yet never take an oath on any account; keep Saturday holy, not even lighting a fire on that day, and yet regard every day alike. In short, he must do a hundred contradictory things, which, of course, it would be impossible for any one to do.

For a man to profess to believe all that is taught in the Bible, and attempt to practise all that is commanded therein, would be plain proof that he was deranged; and his friends would take care of him. Many who profess to make the Bible their guide take such portions as agree with their notions, and translate other portions into the language of

common sense; and thus follow their own counsel, while pretending to follow the Bible's.

If people were to follow Bible examples and obey Bible teachings, they would be slaveholders, polygamists, and liars with Abraham; for we are told that Abraham obeyed God's voice, and kept his charge, his commandments, and his laws (Gen. xxvi. 5). His evil deeds are related without a word of comment; and he is called "The father of the faithful, and the friend of God." They would be liars, thieves, and murderers with David; for we are distinctly told that God said that David kept his commandments, followed him with all his heart, and did that only which was right in his eyes (1 Kings xiv. 8); and, in the next chapter, that he never departed from any thing that he commanded him, "save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite." Here is an absolute indorsement of all his other villanies, which can hardly be exceeded in the whole annals of crime. A following of such teachings as these would make earth a pandemonium of sin and woe.

*"It is absurd to suppose that Moses could palm on a whole nation a festival like the passover, to commemorate an event that never took place."*

Not so absurd as you may suppose. What would have been easier than for Joseph Smith to palm upon the whole Mormon people any ceremony that he chose in commemoration of any event mentioned in his Bible, and that, too, in this age of enlightenment and investigation? How much easier for Moses, in that day of ignorance, had he been so disposed! What was the passover intended to celebrate? The murder of the first-born throughout the land of Egypt, and the deliverance of the Israelites. This could not have been known to the whole body of the people, had it been so. According to the story, they commenced their journey that very day, and could know but little of what took place throughout the land of Egypt, and must have relied upon the statements of Moses and Aaron. By reading 2 Chron. xxxiv., we find, that, in the reign of King Josiah, there was but one copy of the book of Moses in all Judæa, and this was *found* by Hilkiah the priest. What is there that could not be palmed upon a people in such a condition? Any thing almost that this priest might desire. In Neh. viii., we find that the whole Jewish people had forgotten the feast of tabernacles, and that Ezra the priest,

and the Levites, read in the book of the law of God what should be done, and taught the people. Ceremonies are often instituted, and the occasion of their institution, in time, becomes entirely forgotten; when it is no difficult matter to invent a story to account for them, and no hard thing to induce the people to believe it.

*“Equally difficult would it have been for the apostles to tell the people of their day, that they had seen and done what they had never seen and done.”*

Do you, then, know what the apostles told the people of their day? You have no reliable evidence to prove that they told them any of the miraculous stories recorded in the Gospels, or, if they told them, that the people credited them. If they had, it would have been no more than the Mormons do. I have heard a Mormon elder declare publicly that he had raised the dead; and there were witnesses present who bore testimony to the truth of his statement: the Mormons present seemed to have no difficulty in accepting the story; their faith had prepared them. We have no evidence of the existence of the Gospels till more than a hundred years after the death of Jesus. The story of the Nazarene seems to have gathered as it rolled; and what facts existed on which it was built, it is impossible now to tell. We may be sure, however, that the miraculous part of his story cannot be true. You take too much for granted that requires proof,—proof, too, that neither you nor any other person can give.

*“But you must acknowledge that Jesus was a perfect example, a model man for the race.”*

I can acknowledge no such thing. No man can be a perfect model for another; and it is preposterous to talk of this Jewish reformer being a model for all. If all persons were to imitate him, none would marry, and, in a few years, the world would be depopulated; men would cease to labor, and spend their time in preaching, and take no more thought about what they should eat or drink than the sparrows or the roses, and promise those who followed them blessings in this world, and, in the world to come, life everlasting. I cannot say that I have much respect for a man who talks to the people mysteriously, “in parables,” and only explains to a dozen what he means; who calls himself Master, and denounces to everlasting fire all who do not believe and obey his teachings. This has been the method

of religious impostors in every age; and if Jesus was no impostor, and he probably was not, he certainly was a fanatic, and a very extravagant one.

*"The external evidence of the Bible challenges belief."*

We should like to see the evidence that would prove that Moses wrote the books that go by his name, and that God inspired him to make the code of laws contained therein, many of which are so manifestly absurd, cruel, and bloody. Does this evidence prove that the apostles wrote the contradictory accounts of Jesus that are found in the Gospels? Does it prove that the amatory Song of Solomon was penned under divine influence? The fact is, the external evidence, so much talked of, amounts to nothing: it can prove nothing of all that we so much need to have proved.

*"Its internal evidence is ample."*

True; but it is no evidence of its being a revelation from God, but of the contrary. It proves it to be contradictory in its statements of doctrines and facts, and that not once or twice, but hundred of times, — false in philosophy, unworthy of confidence in history, unsound in logic, ignorant in science, dark, mysterious, childish, and unsatisfactory. It abounds in indecent and foolish stories, ridiculous and childish conceits, and wild and extravagant accounts. There is no order in its arrangement, no unity in its style, and no connection in its argument. It abounds with bad grammar, bad morals, and bad philosophy. It sanctions kingly tyranny and parental brutality, upholds slavery, and has recorded the lives of some of the vilest of wretches with such commendations that we may regard them as patterns of all excellency. There are innumerable important moral and scientific truths of which it says nothing; while a great portion of it is taken up in telling the same things over and over again, sometimes in precisely the same words; while other portions are occupied in relating what is of no use to anybody.

*"There is plain teaching enough to show man all his duty, without his plunging into the mists of obscurity."*

You are mistaken: there is a great portion of man's duty that the Bible does not teach; and many things that it does teach men to do are no duties at all. What does it teach respecting the laws of health and the duty of obedience to them? If it does teach any thing in one place, it is almost certain to contradict it in another. It favors the



drinking of intoxicating drinks, and it favors abstinence from them ; it favors flesh-eating, and abstinence from flesh ; marriage, and abstinence from marriage : but of the great laws of health, obedience to which is of such vital importance, it scarcely says a word. It teaches blind and complete submission of children to parents, wives to husbands, servants to masters, and subjects to kings ; destroying the will and manliness of the weaker party, and giving to the tyrant all the power that he may desire. Where it gives good advice, it is done in such general terms, that each man must judge for himself the method to be pursued ; and there is no man who has tried to learn his duty from the Bible, that has not been plunged into "mists of obscurity."

*"Its books teach the same great truths."*

The existence of the spirit after death is a great truth. One book teaches that "a man has no pre-eminence above a beast," and that "as the one dieth, so dieth the other ;" while others teach man's future existence. Some books of the Bible, such as Esther and Solomon's Song, contain no great truths at all.

*"Its discrepancies are those of independent observers."*

If true, it would not prove the Bible to be a divine revelation any more than the agreement of separate histories of England would prove them to be divine. But it is not true. Read the genealogies of Matthew and Luke, the conflicting accounts of the birth of Jesus, his sermon, the calling of his disciples, his miracles, and his resurrection. The differences are numerous and irreconcilable, and plainly show that the men who wrote the Gospels were not observers at all.

*"How can we do without a true standard of appeal in religious matters? How are we to know what is error, and what is truth?"*

We may all see how we can do without it ; for nothing is more certain than that we have no such standard, nor is it necessary. We have no such standard of beauty, of architecture, or of good manners ; yet we can form the beautiful, behold it around us, and enjoy it. We can build structures useful and elegant, and behave with propriety, without any such standards. If by religion you mean goodness, doing at all times what is best for ourselves and all around us, why cannot we do this without a standard? If you mean any thing other than this, superstition would be the proper

name for it; and certainly that needs no standard. You profess to have a standard of appeal, and of what use is it to you? Do all that appeal to it agree in opinion? Are their opinions any nearer to each other and to truth than they would be without that standard? The Universalist appeals to the Scriptures, and thinks he proves from them the final happiness of all sentient beings; while the Calvinist finds there damnation to all but the chosen few. On this foundation, the Roman Catholic builds his palace of mummery; and the Quaker, his worship, which rivals in simplicity that of the ancient fishermen. The Shaker, who denounces all sexual intercourse, finds his authority in the Bible, equally with the Mormon, who, like a Jewish patriarch, lords it over a dozen women, the scriptural victims of his lust. You can find no greater difference, nor yet as great difference, between the creeds of those who do not regard the Bible as authority than of those who do. Of what use, then, is your standard?

If the United States possessed a standard measure of a yard, to which all parties had access, and yet we found honest men with measures that they called yards, of fifteen, thirty, and fifty inches in length, which they all declared they had made from the standard, what should we think? We might possibly think that the standard differed in length at different times, or that the men had not sufficient knowledge to form their standard from it; but, at all events, we should conclude, that, as a standard, it was of no earthly use whatever, and that they would be likely to do better without it than with it. And what are we to think of the Bible as a standard of truth, when we find honest, intelligent men who come to it, differ so very widely in their opinions respecting God, man, duty, and truth generally? We can only rationally conclude, that, as a standard, the book is of no use.

*"The Bible bears on its face the proof that it is God's word. The unity and beauty of its style, the morality of its precepts, the purity, majesty, sublimity, and perfection of its character, bespeak its origin divine."*

Are all books divine that are beautiful, whose style is uniform, and that contain excellent moral precepts? If so, we should have many divine books; but the Bible would not be of the number. You speak of it as a whole, as one single book, the production of one author, and equally good

in every part, — Genesis, Solomon's Song, and Revelation. You could not speak more highly of it, had you seen it drop from the heavens at mid-day, with the name of Jehovah inscribed in characters of light upon the titlepage. Just so Mussulmans feel about the Koran, and for the very same reason; and if you and they would examine both, divested of early prejudices, the true character of these respective sacred books would be revealed. The style of the Bible is as varied as its writers; some of whom give us a rugged narration of incidents unenlivened by a poetic expression, while others revel in all the beauties of Oriental imagery. There is no comparison between the best book of the Bible and the writings of Plato, Epictetus, and Seneca. Old heathens as you call them, Jehovah's favorites cannot begin to equal them for reason, good sense, or morality.

So far is the Bible from being pure, that, unless a person is familiar with it, he must carefully scan what he is about to read, lest he bring the blush of shame to the face of his hearers.

There is in the Bible truth; and no one should reject it because it is there: but every one should take the liberty of separating the precious from the vile, the pure from the filthy, the true and natural from the false and superstitious. There is a great difference between the foolish and wicked exploits of Samson, and the sayings and doings of Jesus. The amatory and indelicate Song of Solomon is little like the Epistles of John.

The Bible is an armory, where the honest may equip themselves for the true warfare, and where the murderer may find weapons to destroy. It is a mine containing gold and worthless rock, true riches and heaps of rubbish. It is a mixture of good and bad, wisdom and folly, old wives' fables and old men's reasons, Jewish prejudices and everlasting truths. It is a sea into which men cast the net, and draw to shore both good and bad; and they should be wise enough to keep the good, and throw the bad away.

*"If you reject one part of the Bible, you might as well throw it all away."*

That does not follow. In reading Roman history, we may reject the fable of Romulus and Remus being suckled by a wolf, and yet give credence to a thousand facts recorded therein. If some one should bind up in one volume Euclid's Elements of Geometry and the Exploits of Baron

Munchausen, we surely might reject the boasting stories of the baron without being under the necessity of throwing away the demonstrable truths of the geometer. We may then reject the ridiculous stories and childish ideas of the Bible, yet believe what seems to us to be reasonable, and be benefited by it.

Men have made the Bible an idol: the ministers of the different churches are its priests, who have enthroned it; while the multitude have bowed and worshipped, offering their time, talents, and even reason, a sacrifice to this paper god. Those who cannot worship this idol, who will not bow the knee to this image, are denounced and treated as the vilest wretches. But error cannot always rule, neither can falsehood be forever triumphant. Dislike it as the fogies may, the time has come when every thing must be examined. There is nothing that can escape the strictest scrutiny, however old, sacred, or firmly rooted it may be; though its foundations lie deep in the rubbish of ages, there are those who will dig and discover whether it rests on sand or rock; though its head reach the clouds, there are daring spirits who will mount as the eagle, and examine its top-stone. Tremble, thou old gray-headed lie, thou pagan fable, thou unmanly superstition; for, though enshrined in the Holy of holies, the day is approaching, the hour, that shall drag thee to light, and expose thy hidden deformities to thy blinded worshippers. The flood is rising that shall sweep away thy temple, and leave not a trace behind.

It is well that this scrutinizing spirit should be abroad. It is time that every door was opened, not excepting the church-door, and reason invited to walk in. Truth fears not a microscope; but the glance of a true man's eye is sufficient to blast a lie. Feet are ours to walk with, eyes to see with, and reasoning powers to think, search, and prove all things with. Neglecting to do this, acting upon the principle that there are things to be believed without examination, because they are too sacred to be meddled with, in Turkey you would cry, "There is one God, and Mohammed is his prophet;" firmly believe in his heavenly flight and angelic visions, and denounce as infidels all who had doubts of the Moslem faith. In India you would be a devotee of Juggernaut, and be willing to sacrifice your life to a grim image of wood; and in China, knock your forehead on the

threshold of an idol temple, and burn incense to Confucius as the highest representative of humanity the world has yet seen. In all countries, dogmas are taught, which are regarded as too sacred for rational investigation; and the consequence is, that men are made the dupes of the superstitious and crafty, allowing their eyes to be closed, when, in fact, they have most need of them; and thus become the slaves of childish fears and wild delusions, which, like phantoms, revel in the darksome night, but disappear in the light of reason.

*"What should we have done without the Bible?"*

It is difficult to tell exactly what we should have done without the Bible, as it is difficult to tell what we should have done without the steam-engine. We do know, however, that, long before the first chapter of Genesis was written, men had formed languages, erected houses, made pottery, smelted iron and manufactured it, built ships, domesticated wild animals, learned how to write, paint, weave, plough, sow, reap, grind, and make bread; they were married, formed nations, framed wise laws and moral codes, and were marching constantly to a still higher civilization. It is but fair to presume, that, since they did so well without the Bible, they would have continued to do well without it.

*"What are you going to give us instead of the Bible?"*

We have no wish to take the Bible away: we are only desirous that people should have rational views regarding it. Let the Bible stand, to be studied by men and women, that they may learn the crude religious conceptions of early times and primitive peoples. It will serve the purpose of a mile-stone, to show us the rate of our advance. But if you wish to study the history of the world in which you live, and to learn how it came into its present condition, don't fritter away your time in reading and studying the first and second chapters of Genesis, with the notes of modern commentators from Stackhouse to Albert Barnes; for you will know less, if possible, than when you began. Geology will give you knowledge and satisfaction on this subject as it has to all who have investigated it. Would you be healthy, study physiology; would you know the laws of mind, study phrenology, where alone you can find the record of them; and, if you would know the condition of man after death, listen to the living testimony of your

own spirit-friends, who will satisfy you that the writers of the Bible were as ignorant on this subject as they were regarding the revelations of modern science.

The model according to which you need to shape your life must of necessity be within you. If you wish to be a hero in life's battle, aim to live each day up to your highest ideal; to-morrow you will have a better, nobler model; and so, through life, each day will find you a holier, happier man. As you scale the mountain of manhood, the prospect will enlarge around you, the heavens grow clearer above you, the birds will discourse to you sweeter music; and the happiness of angels will be no stranger to your heart. And when the ripened spirit shall pant for a wider freedom and a sunnier clime, death, the strong deliverer, shall lead you home.

Allow me now to ask you a few questions. If the Bible is a revelation from God, does it contain the whole of his will, or only a part?

If we can learn some portions of his will without such revelation, why not all?

You cannot but acknowledge that Bible writers erred in their conduct. Moses, on account of his error, was not allowed to enter the promised land; David acknowledges his sinfulness; Solomon departed from the faith; Paul rebuked Peter because he was to blame; and Paul acknowledges that he was far from perfect. And, since they erred in their conduct, they must have erred in their judgment, or been wilful sinners. If they erred in their judgment, what was to prevent them from writing their errors? and, if they were wilful wrong-doers, what confidence can we place in them as infallible writers of a holy book?

Did the writers of the Bible know that they were inspired of God to write it? and, if they did, how did they know it?

Do you know any man who makes the Bible his guide, and attempts to obey *all* its teachings? Do you know any one who tries to obey all the New-Testament commands? If you do not (and there are certainly no such persons), what is it that informs them that some should be obeyed, and others neglected?

If this is their reason or judgment, is not that, after all, their guide; and would it not be much better to allow it to operate untrammelled?

*“Destroy our belief in the divine authority of the Bible, and all our hopes of eternal life are fled: we rush blindly forward along a pathway shrouded by continual gloom.”*

If you have no stronger or better belief in a future life than the Bible gives, you are to be pitied. I know many who have no faith whatever in the divine authority of the Bible, yet have a living faith in, nay, an absolute knowledge of, a future life of ceaseless advancement. The light of the Bible on this subject is but the dim twinkling of the stars, with an occasional fiery meteor blazing fearfully across the heavens, compared with the day's bright, joyous dawn. Multitudes have perfect assurance of a future life, not because some long-dead Matthew, Peter, or John says so, but because their senses have given them evidence on this subject, that they cannot dispute. If men would search for living evidence, there would be no need to seek for it among the ashes of the dead.

*“But it is well known, that in those countries where the Bible is read, studied, and believed in, there is more knowledge and greater freedom, more virtue and happiness, than in any other countries.”*

If true, and if all this was the result of reading and believing the Bible, it would not prove the Bible to be divine. A book may be useful, though merely human. But where is the proof that we owe our virtue, liberty, and enlightenment to the Bible? The Abyssinians have had the Bible in their possession twice as long as the Anglo-Saxons, and yet they are a race of barbarians still. What did the Bible accomplish for the people of Syria and Asia Minor, who were first blessed with it? So little, that the Koran superseded it; the Mohammedans being superior in almost every respect to the Christians whom they conquered and converted. The Greeks and Romans were as far in advance of surrounding nations as we are or profess to be. Was it the Bible that elevated them, and made their unsurpassed poets, painters, sculptors, and orators? Their priests, doubtless, attributed their superiority to the superior religion they possessed. The Chinese are farther in advance of the New-Hollanders than we are of the Turks; and no doubt the pious among the Chinese attribute it to the sayings of Confucius, which the natives of the island continent do not possess. Some one speaks of institutions that give themselves credit for all the good that exists in spite of them.

So Bible believers oppose science and reform to the last; but when they triumph in spite of their opposition, they are the first to shout glory to the Bible for what it has accomplished.

If the Bible had been the only instrumentality employed for our elevation and enlightenment, we might have been able to tell what is its simple influence on a people; but, as there are a thousand instrumentalities at work, it is impossible to tell how much of our superiority it should be credited with. This we know, that, when the literature of Greece and Rome was supplanted by that of the Bible and the Christian fathers, a night of mental darkness spread over the world, which was not broken up till the invention of printing and the revival of pagan literature. Where a people are much lower than the Bible plane, it may tend to elevate them; but, where they are above it, its influence is degrading.

Many Bible believers have proved themselves to be far from being enlightened, humane, or liberal; and their bigotry and cruelty have generally been in proportion to their veneration for and exclusive use of the Bible. Calvin was a Bible worshipper, and caused Servetus to be burned at the stake because the enlightened doctor could not see the Bible with the same eyes as this tyrant of Geneva. The Catholics, who have tormented and murdered millions, are Bible believers to a man. Who were greater upholders of the Bible than the Puritans of New England? yet they whipped and even hung the Quakers, who went among them preaching a better gospel than their own. Who kept four millions of human beings in bondage, sold them like cattle when they pleased, and did not allow them to call their souls their own? — who but Bible believers? And who countenanced them in this, sanctifying the robbery and foul wrong, and gave the pretended sanction of heaven to this blackest crime? Ministers, with the Bible in their hands, who preached from “Servants, obey your masters,” and placed God’s foot on the neck of the trembling slave.

*“But you must be an infidel if you do not believe the Bible to be divine.”*

Who would not be an unbeliever in all things unreasonable and foolish? The name “infidel,” which the orthodox are so ready to give to every one who differs from them in opinion, has lost its terror. Were I to profess to be other



than a disbeliever of orthodox follies and delusions, I should be a traitor to my own soul. Socrates was an infidel, because he was in advance of his countrymen. Jesus was called a Samaritan, or, in other words, an infidel, because, in opposition to Jewish traditions and Mosaic follies, he spoke the thoughts of his manly soul, regardless of the Bible of his day. Galileo was an infidel, because he asserted what all are now willing to acknowledge; but, as it was unscriptural, he had to bear the name and suffer the fate of the infidel. The early Quakers were denounced as infidel, because they regarded the light within them as superior to the written record of that light in the men of the past.

If it be infidelity to seek for truth with an unprejudiced mind, to love it above all things, and be willing to make any sacrifice for its sake, who would not be an infidel? If it be infidelity to believe that there is a divine revelation as wide as the world, and as comprehensive as the human race; that God evermore speaks to us by his laws which surround us, and by our reason, which is his voice within us: then to be infidel is to be free, intelligent, and manly; it is to live the best life here, and thus prepare for the highest life hereafter.

But those who make use of the term "infidel" do it reproachfully; when they meet with a man whose arguments they cannot answer, and whose life is irreproachable, all they can do is to raise the cry of "Infidel!" This saves them the trouble of answering his arguments; for who is going to discuss with an infidel? What minister will soil his holy fingers by coming in contact with such an unclean thing? It also saves the church from contamination: only persuade the members of a church that a man is an infidel, and they will shun him as they would the plague; they will no more dare to read his writings than to put their hands in the fire. Thus this term is exceedingly convenient to a certain class. No wonder that it is whispered in the parlor, and thundered from the pulpit, till the whole land rings with the sound. But know this, O priests and people! he is the infidel who loves money more than truth; who preaches lies for hire and falsehoods for gain; who bows down to wealth, and worships mammon, regardless of truth and justice; who professes to believe the Bible is the word of God, and yet is utterly regardless of its teachings when they conflict with his own interests.

*"If you take away the sacred character of the Scriptures, you destroy the foundation of all religion, and the whole fabric of morality falls to the ground."*

You never were more mistaken. The foundations of true religion do not rest on the Bible, but on man's nature, and are as enduring as that nature itself. The religion that consists in teasing God, in begging for favors, in mumbling childish prayers, in dozing every seventh day in some fashionable church, in howling like a dervish in revival meetings, in denouncing every disbeliever in orthodox dogmas as an infidel and a blasphemer, — such religion as that might die and be buried, and the world would be the better without it. But the religion that consists in being good and doing good is a part of our very constitution, as much as our love of the beautiful. Men were religious in this sense before the first chapter of Genesis was written; and they will be when the Bible is no longer regarded as authority by a thinking soul. That a large portion of what is called religion by the orthodox would be destroyed, there is no doubt, — its partial, cruel Deity; its irrational dogmas; its hatred of truth, and its sanction of crime. The sooner the grave closes over it the better, and something worthier takes its place.

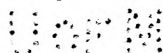
Did ever man do right? Then did his right doing bring its own reward, whether he were blessed Jew or cursed Gentile, Catholic kneeling to kiss the pope's toe, or Yezidee offering his propitiatory sacrifice to the Devil. Did ever man do wrong? Then did his wrong doing bring its own curse, certain as that sun brings light; and all the prayers of the religious professors in the world could not make it otherwise. Dark is the soul that thinks he can entice the Spirit of the universe by the splendor of his temple, or make him his peculiar friend by the number of his supplications or the straitness of his creed! Is he like thee, blind sectarian, that he should curse every one who does not travel thy path or kneel at thy shrine? Is he a man, that thou shouldst style thy worshipping-place his house; thy hired Sunday talker his minister; and a volume written by men blinder than thyself, his word? Open thy eyes and be amazed at thy folly: the Indian in the wild might teach thee a worthier religion. When thy little sect has vanished from the earth, and its name is all unknown, even to thyself; when the Bible has perished, and the name of Jesus is lost to

every dweller on this planet: then true religion will be fresh as the dew, beautiful as the morning, blessing all people everywhere.

The miserable Jewish "cribbed, cabined, and confined" religion, that would be destroyed, is a disgrace to the age in which we dwell. It is an image, not of the universe, deep and boundless, but of the narrow, thread-drawn souls that made and support it. It says, with the bigot Paul, "Neither is there salvation in any other;" and exclaims to every outsider, "Thou art a base-born dog, and perdition is thy home." This religion puts more faith in a dead lie than a living truth; it makes God an infinite tyrant, man a cowardly slave; and would damn a world to save itself. When its advocates arrive at the spirit-land, and find Volney, Paine, and Parker occupying higher positions than themselves, they will be ready, like Jonah, to weep because God's heart is less contracted than their own.

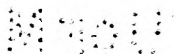
This offspring of bigotry and pride is baptized by the name of the "Christian Religion." As certainly as we are, it is not the religion of our nature. It is not the religion for men: it cannot fit us for this world, much less for the next. It is a fiendish inquisitor, that grips us by the throat, and demands that we believe in a black devil and an eternal hell, before it loosens its hold. It wars with the best feelings of our nature. We see in childhood the innocence of a new-born flower; but orthodoxy comes with a long, frowning face, and gravely talks of depravity and original sin, as though God had stamped his children with the Devil's seal. It dooms to eternal torments the noblest names of which earth can boast. The best painters, sculptors, poets, historians, and scientists have been infidels, or careless and indifferent to the claims of what is called evangelical religion: hence a host of noble men and women have gone to grace the regions of the damned, and howl their endless lives in blasphemies away; while it lifts up to heaven and makes partakers of all its glories the vilest and most abandoned wretches, if they repent, and believe its unreasonable dogmas. Truly, if a want of faith in the sacred character of the Scriptures will destroy this religion, and leave us free to obtain a natural, and, consequently, a rational religion, it will be a most blessed thing.

To spread abroad and keep up what is called the Christian religion, many of whose doctrines would disgrace hea-



thendom, to charge the battery and galvanize this corpse Bible societies pour out rivers of old traditions, millions of money are spent, printing-presses are in continual operation, and a hundred thousand pulpits din the drowsy ears of a multitude of self-styled and self-satisfied saints. And we are told, that, if it were not for this machinery, the whole fabric of morality would fall to the ground a shapeless ruin. Shall all the forests of the globe disappear because the axe is laid at the root of a rotten tree that cumpers the ground? Shall the moon cease to shine because a smoky lamp is blown out? or the sun be blotted from the sky because a feeble taper is extinguished? Shall religion die because Jewish fables are taken at their true value? or morality be no more because Christian sectarianism is gone? Not more foolish is a madman's dream. Sects and Bibles are things of yesterday, and will disappear to-morrow; but freedom, truth, love, uprightness, belong to the soul, existed ages before a book of any kind was written, are inculcated by people of all climes, are recognized by all religions; they are the natural product of the soil which underlies them all, and they shall spring up and be green and fruitful forever.

True religion knows no sects or parties, no priests or thirty-nine-articled creeds. It does not believe that all truth is shut up in a book, big or little; but looks for light within, without. It not only believes that God did live, but that he does live; not only that he did speak, but that he does speak, to me, to thee, as to Jesus and George Fox. It does not go with a dark lantern to look for truth in a mummy pit, among the withered, dusty, cobwebbed dead, but is out in the sunshine gathering the flowers that our universal Mother has strewed on every hand. True religion needs no splendid temples, no grand display, no mitred priest, no silk-gowned, lawn-sleeved bishop, no black-coated minister; it needs no gorgeous altar, no silver crucifix, no silk-tasselled pulpit, no holy days, holy sacraments, or holy houses. All it needs is noble, upright souls; men and women who will seek for truth as for hidden treasure, and when found, and her voice heard, will obey her requirements at all hazards. In these it lives and flourishes in unfading verdure, in eternal bloom. It teaches us to develop the man within us nobly, fearlessly, and harmoniously, to manifest our religion by a pure and holy life; and then points us in the future to a realm where progress is forever possible. This is the



“religion that can give sweetest pleasures while we live;” and this “religion can supply solid comfort when we die.” Its flower has no thorn, and its honey no poison. It is the child of God, and the friend of man. The dungeon at its presence smiles; and its gloomy portals, at its touch, are transformed into the pearly gates of paradise. It consecrates all places; the cottage becomes as holy as the Jewish temple, and the ploughed field as the splendid cathedral. It consecrates all useful work: ploughing and sowing are as holy as singing and praying; the sound of the woodman’s axe and the blacksmith’s anvil is as sacred as the organ’s chant. It consecrates all times; Monday is as Sunday, work-day as rest-day; all are God’s, all are man’s, and all are good. It consecrates all persons; the ploughman is a priest, and the shoemaker offers acceptable sacrifice; the leather apron and the fustian jacket are one with the priest’s vesture, and the fine linen of Aaron.

To destroy false religion, and spread the true, to deliver men from the bondage of error, and to speed the time when Truth and Love, twin sisters, shall be recognized and accepted by all people, I have written this pamphlet. I send it forth without fear, knowing whatever is true in it cannot but live, and whatever is false will deservedly die.



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