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The Bible at Work.

BY THE REV. W. FISHER, M.A.

POSSIBLY few, if any, Reports of equal importance are less read or even less known than the large Annual Report of the Bible Society. Certainly no Report is more interesting, instructive, or better worth reading. No Report gives a more illuminating view of the world at large in its religious aspect and condition. It is no comprehensive survey, treatment, or digest; but while of necessity containing things official and statistical, it gives in a happy way a singular insight into the religious mind and disposition of varying nationalities as in their direct contact with the Word of God. Whether it be a wandering tribe or an ancient civilization, intellectual culture or none, there is the universal confession of a deep and fundamental relationship between the contents of the Book and the deeper contents of human nature. Differences of race and religion are incidental differences of scenery. The critical elements are common to them all.



Whatever the present position and the future fate of the "argument from design," there is an unanswerableness with the argument from results. This was well expressed by Dr. J. H. Moulton in an article in the *Hibbert Journal*, discussing the "Credentials of the Gospel." "Credentials! Is not the Bible House in Queen Victoria Street worth all the apologetics in the world? Take any book ever written, the very flower of literature and the supremest effort of human thought, translate it into 412 languages, from Sanskrit down to the rudest jargon of savages, and scatter it broadcast over the world. When that is done, and the books have sold everywhere, and brought civilization and humanity wherever they have gone, it will be time to discuss whether there is anything unique in Christianity." This argument will be the more enforced if an effort is made to estimate what would be the present condition of the world to-day if, instead of this world-wide distribution of the Scriptures in many tongues, there had been a corresponding circulation in tongue and place of the works of Voltaire, or Paine's "Age of Reason."



Miss Marston, of Lucknow, reports in the *Zenana* an interesting instance of the quiet percolation of the Scriptures among Indian students. "One day a young man, who was reading in the next room, came to me bringing a book in his hand, which I saw to be 'Tom Brown's Schooldays.' He wished me to explain to him two references to the Bible which he had found. I asked him if he had a Bible, and at once he brought me a handsomely bound one which had been given to him by the Bible Society on his passing his B.A. examination at the Allahabad University. I found him the passages referred to, and for some little time after he was reading intently. Later on he told me, 'I have very little time for reading any other books except the Bible, as I am reading for the Law.'"

In an interesting article in the *Times* of September 1, on the subtler "Difficulties of Translation," the writer says: "It is significant that the finest translation in the world is the Authorized Version of the Scriptures." It is still more significant that there are many "finest translations." The Malagasy is said to be one of the very best, and the Arabic is held to be almost perfect. The German, Tamil, and Bengali are remarkably fine versions, and there are many others that would have their place in the front rank. The meaning of these "finest translations" is that the Bible has a remarkable and almost mysterious adaptability for translation, and can be rendered into diverse languages—the most weird and the most scientific—as no other book in the world.



The conflict, real or professed, of science and religion is frequently in evidence, and not always without advantage. Of late years it has almost been a rule with the President of the British Association, in choice thought, and felicitous language, to illustrate the fellowship there can be between religion and science. This was exceptionally so with Sir George Darwin at Johannesburg, and Sir Joseph Thomson was peculiarly happy in the closing sentence of his Presidential Address at Winnipeg in August. It will suffer, as it will enjoy, constant quotation. "As we conquer peak after peak we see in front of us regions full of interest and beauty, but we do not see our goal, we do not see the horizon; in the distance tower still higher peaks, which will yield to those who ascend them still wider prospects, and deepen the feeling, whose truth is emphasized by every advance in science, that 'Great are the works of the Lord.'" From such a man there is more than charm and impressiveness in such an utterance, and it may be that the time will come when a truly scientific apprehension of God will be found to be the one commanding key to the vast and wonderful realm that scientific research is exploring and subjugating.



At the close of his "Eastern Church" Stanley says: "A revered teacher asked whether there were in the existing resources of mankind any materials for a new epoch, distinct from those which had gone before—and answered that there were none. We have seen that four great phases have passed over the fortunes of the Church; is there likely to be another? With all reverence and with all caution may not the reflections we have just made encourage us to hope that such a mine does exist—a virgin mine—in the original records of Christianity. We need not speculate on the probable destinies of any Christian system. . . . But a serious comparison of the actual contents of the Scriptures with the actual course of ecclesiastical events almost inevitably brings us to the conclusion that the existing materials, principles, and doctrines of the Christian religion are far greater than have ever yet been employed; that the Christian Church, if it ever be permitted or enabled to use them, has a long lease of new life and new hope before it such as has never yet been enjoyed."