

in which the substantial truth of the old will be conserved, and the truth in which the modern mind insists is also fully assimilated. A new and broader theory of the universe? No; but something more substantial in the first place. What is needed, and what is actually beginning to show itself beneath all the soulless culture of to-day, is a new movement of the spiritual life towards the discovery and appreciation of itself on the deepest reality. This deeper life-movement, which the philosopher can only interpret and bring to clear consciousness, may be seen even in the varied movements we have described, shallow and soulless as they appear. It is seen in the materialist's devotion to his science, which is in direct contradiction to his materialism, for it shows that in his claim to survey and eliminate nature, he himself stands spiritually above nature. It is seen in the socialist's devotion and self-sacrifice, which directly contradict the end of material happiness he professes, and show that for him the spiritual good is higher than the material. It is seen even in the individualist's demand of freedom and his claim to be allowed to make the best of his life—though he has not yet discovered where true freedom and self-development lie. In short, wherever you find unselfish devotion, genuine

sympathy, self-forgetting love, even interest in work for the work's sake, there you find a reality that is above nature with its individual strivings. The spiritual life has thus some foothold still; indeed, it can never die, or be permanently ignored. As yet, however, this deeper world of the spirit has not been understood at its true value. We think of it as an ideal that is as a shadowy realm, and quite secondary to the reality of nature. What we need then, in order to press forward with a clear consciousness of our aims and to unite the forces of modern life in substantial progress, is a new metaphysic, or, shall we say, a new appreciation of the spiritual life in us, as the deepest reality in our experience. As against the realism of to-day, which places the centre of truth in material things, we have to rise to a new realism of the spiritual life, as a movement not growing out of the merely natural, but striking its roots deeper into the whole of reality. The only satisfactory key to all our experience is that there is an independent spiritual life, not a product of the individual man with his natural likes and dislikes, but communicating itself to him, and exalting him above nature and revealing itself on the deeper reality of the universe.

(To be concluded.)

## The Great Text Commentary.

### THE GREAT TEXTS OF ROMANS.

#### ROMANS XV. 4.

'For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that through patience and through comfort of the scriptures we might have hope.'—R.V.

ST. PAUL here states a great principle. It is the principle that the Old Testament was throughout designed for the instruction and establishment of New Testament believers. That is to say, the true 'Author behind the authors' of that mysterious Book watched, guided, effected its construction, from end to end, with the purpose full in His view of instructing for all time the developed Church of Christ. We have here a principle to guide us in the study of the Scriptures, both of the Old and of the New Testament. Their main use lies in their power so to teach as to

develop character in us. 'Whatsoever things were written aforetime,' that is to say, the whole of the Jewish Scriptures, including the Histories, the Psalms, the Prophecies (however they may have originated, and by whatsoever channel they may have come down to us), have now this definite purpose to fulfil, this practical end to serve, that they contribute to our learning. They exist for the information of the present, and for the education of future ages.

I have purposely refrained from reading *Lux Mundi*, but I am quite sure that our Christian faith ought not to be perilled on any predetermined view of what the history and character of the documents contained in the O.T. must be. What we are bound to hold is that the O.T., substantially as we receive it, is the Divine record of the discipline of Israel. This it remains, whatever criticism may determine or leave undetermined as to constituent parts. No one now,

I suppose, holds that the first three chapters of Genesis, for example, give a literal history—I could never understand how any one reading them with open eyes could think they did—yet they disclose to us a gospel. So it is probably elsewhere. Are we not going through a trial in regard to the use of popular language on literary subjects like that through which we went, not without sad losses, in regard to the use of popular language on physical subjects? If you feel now that it was, to speak humanly, necessary that the Lord should speak of the ‘sun rising,’ it was no less necessary that He should use the names ‘Moses’ and ‘David’ as His contemporaries used them. There was no critical question at issue. (Poetry is, I think, a thousand times more true than History; this is a private parenthesis for myself alone.)<sup>1</sup>

## I.

## WHAT WE ARE TO LEARN IN THE SCRIPTURES.

There are many kinds of learning to be got out of the Bible. It is a great manual of Eastern antiquities; it gives us information about the ancient world which we can obtain nowhere else. It carries us back to the early dawn of history, when as yet all we commonly mean by civilization did not exist. Again, it is a handbook of political experience. It shows us what a nation can do, and may have to suffer; how it may be affected by the conduct of its rulers; how it may make its rulers to be like itself. So again, it is a rich collection of the wisdom which should govern personal conduct; a man need not believe in Revelation in order to admire the shrewdness and penetration of the Book of Proverbs. Again, it is a mine of poetry; it contains the very highest poetry which the human race possesses; poetry before which the great masters of song—Homer, Dante, Shakespeare—must bow; poetry by which the two last have been, in fact, themselves largely inspired. Once more, it is a choice field for the study of language; in its pages we follow one language, the Hebrew, from its cradle to its grave; and it gives us lessons in the art of making language describe the emotions and moods of the soul which are not to be found elsewhere. But a man may be a good antiquarian, historian, economist, linguist, moralist; he may take the keenest interest in Scripture because it has so much to say on each and all of these subjects; and yet he may be entirely ignorant of the true teaching of Scripture. He may read the Bible, just as some people come to Church, only to admire the architecture or the music, thus missing the very end

<sup>1</sup> Westcott, *Life and Letters*, ii. 68.

which these beautiful and useful accessories of worship are intended to promote—the communion of the soul with God. Language, history, poetry, antiquities—these are not the subjects which the Bible was intended to teach us, interesting and valuable as they are in their way; they are taught in other books, ancient and modern, and by human teachers. The Bible must do something more for us than this, if it is to claim its title of the Book of God.

The Bible contains every type of true and valuable religious literature that is to be found in non-Christian sacred books, from the products of high psychic excitation to those of devout reflexion and ratiocination: prose and poetry, vision and chronicle, mystic flights and apophthegms of shrewd practical wisdom, religious out-pourings and ethical precepts. What we admire in the Vedas, in the Zend-Avesta, in the works of Lao-tsze, Confucius, and Mencius, in the sublime precepts of Gautama-Buddha, in the splendid zeal of Mohammed—all is there, and far more besides. There is a theology latent in the Bible that will never become obsolete; there is a human life depicted there which will supply inexhaustible ideals for men of every race and generation; there is a regenerating power in the sacramental truths enunciated there that none of the other ‘Bibles’ can point to. By the side of the revelations embodied in the Christian Scriptures the sacred books of China show themselves not religion at all, but mere philosophy; Buddhism is but negative; Islam, with its remote, despotic God, is void of all message of redeeming love.<sup>1</sup>

We search the world for truth; we cull  
The good, the pure, the beautiful  
From graven stone and written scroll,  
From all old flower-fields of the soul;  
And, weary seekers of the best,  
We come back laden from our quest,  
To find that all the sages said  
Is in the Book our mothers read,  
And all our treasure of old thought  
In His harmonious fulness wrought,  
Who gathers in one sheaf complete  
The scattered blades of God’s sown wheat,  
The common growth that maketh good  
His all-embracing Fatherhood.<sup>2</sup>

The text lays down very clearly the belief in the abiding value of the Old Testament which underlies St. Paul’s use of it. The Scriptures are to be read for our moral instruction, ‘for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness’; for the perfection of the Christian character, ‘that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work.’ St. Paul claims for the Old Testament these two things: (1) it teaches us great moral and spiritual truths; and (2) it witnesses to Christ.

<sup>1</sup> L. Ragg, *The Book of Books*, 281.

<sup>2</sup> Whittier.

1. *The whole Old Testament was written to teach us great moral and spiritual truths*, and therefore it has an abiding practical value for faith and life. It is refreshing to recall St. Paul's claim when we have been harried by the worries of criticism, with the wrangles over Old Testament records. After all, let the dates and the authors be what and who they may, let the process by which the materials came together be long or short, simple or complicated, discoverable or undiscoverable, there at last the record stands, there at last the Book lies open before us, and the clear purpose which has brought it together is as manifest and certain as ever. It is the record of the spiritual experiences of a race, experiences unique and prolonged, and manifold and momentous, experiences which embody and disclose the ways by which God has worked in the world, the methods by which He has drawn men near to Him, the discipline under which He has trained and purged and uplifted them. Through varied periods, under infinite variety of circumstance, still He pursued His design with them, till they came to a clearer understanding of that mind. Over two thousand years of historical development carried on the continuous tale, and now, collected, sifted, amalgamated, there the entire story lies. Unknown hands, it is true, have worked at it, unremembered lives have uttered themselves through it, but all witness to the will, the character, the intention with which God Almighty deals with men's souls and bodies; and since He is the Eternal God who changeth not, it reveals for all time and to all people what is His perpetual mode of treatment, His rule of conduct, His moral characteristics, His Fatherly handling, His way of bringing out judgment into victory. Therefore all these things are significant for us to-day, they reveal how that eternal God will prove Himself to be the same to us as to men of old time who served and trusted Him then.

2. *The Old Testament witnesses to Christ.* It is not only a bead-roll of faith, not only a record of heroic testimony, a treasure of splendid experience, but it is also a unity, a single Book, a single, supreme, consistent, continuous action. From end to end it says one thing and one only; it recalls one single event. By St. Paul's own special title it is called the mystery, the open secret, the Divine act of revelation, the thing that God was always

doing under cover as hidden leaven, yet preparing to be disclosed—the thing that was prepared from the foundation of the world, and that was at last done at the one fit moment, at the time and at the spot made ready according to the end decreed—the Mystery, Jesus Christ, the Hope of Glory. From cover to cover the Book is full of Him, and of Him only, one mind felt in it everywhere, one spirit quickening it, one Face looking out. From cover to cover the Bible records but one fact; it is a body possessed by a single dominant soul, and the soul that possesses it is Jesus Christ. He is the Harmony into which all its voices blend. He throws this or that into the background. He brings other parts forward to the front; His character is the Bible's conscience. His life is the measure of its inspiration.

Grant me, Lord, in all my studies,  
Through all volumes roaming where I list,  
Whatsoever spacious distance  
Rise in ample grandeur through thought's mist,  
Whatsoever land I find me,  
That of right divine to claim for Christ.

Do men dare to call Thy Scripture—  
Mystic forest, unillumin'd nook?  
If it be so, O my spirit!  
Then let Christ arise on thee, and look  
With the long lane of His sunlight  
Shall be cut the forest of His Book.

## II.

### HOW WE ARE TO LEARN.

'Through patience and through comfort of the scriptures.'

No one can take account of the wide world darkened for the most part by gross idolatry, so that a fraction only of mankind even now know the name of the one God: no one can look out upon Christendom, desolated by war, and degraded by sin: no one can ponder the differences by which the foremost champions of right and purity and love are separated, without being at first filled with doubt and dismay. Can this, we ask, be the issue of the gospel, this partial spread, this imperfect acceptance, this discordant interpretation of the truth? When we are thus cast down, the Scriptures bring us comfort. By the long annals of the Divine history of mankind—so long that we can hardly go back in imagination to the earliest forms of religious life which they record—we are taught to see the slowness

of God's working, the patience with which He accepts what man in his weakness can offer, the variety of service which He guides to one end; and hope is again kindled.

Nature illustrates the lesson of the Bible. No result has been established more certainly by recent investigations than the gradual passage from lower to higher types of life in the natural world through enormous intervals of time. So far from this being opposed to revelation, as some have rashly argued, it falls in exactly with what the Bible teaches us of the spiritual progress of men. Why there should be this marvellous slowness in either case we cannot tell. It is enough for us to know that in this respect the whole Divine plan goes forward to our eyes in the same way. And if cycles of being came into existence and perished, if continents were washed away and re-formed before the earth was made fit for the habitation of man, we shall not wonder that it was by little and little that he was himself enabled to apprehend his relation to God, and through God to his fellows and to the world. And following the same guidance we shall be contented to wait while this knowledge which has been given to us spreads on all sides from scattered centres of light. Such has been the law from the first. We who see but little, and that little for a short time, would perhaps gladly have had it otherwise; but as we trust the Bible we can hope with full assurance, looking with patience to that end towards which all creation is moving, however slowly.<sup>1</sup>

E. von Dobschütz, writing on the 'Bible in the Church,' calls it 'the unparalleled religious guide-book.' He further asserts that 'an unusually favourable opportunity is afforded in the letters of Bismarck to his wife, from which we learn that the Bible was read daily by one of the greatest statesmen. . . . The chief enemy of the Bible is ignorance of it. Doubts and suspicions do not arise from Bible-reading, but they are communicated from outside to those who are not acquainted with the Bible. Of the whole book these people know only those passages which are attacked by the modern "Enlightenment." Consequently they hold it in contempt . . . as a hindrance to education and culture. Had they ever experienced any of the comfort and gladness which the pious reader can draw from its pages, they would be of a different opinion. The history of the Bible is an objective proof of its beneficent operation.'<sup>2</sup>

Charles Dickens, in a letter to his youngest son, when the boy was leaving home to join his brother in Australia, wrote: 'I put a New Testament among your books, for the very same reasons, and with the same hopes, that made me write an easy account of it for you when you were a little child. Because it is the best book that ever was . . . known in the world; and because it teaches you the best lessons by which any human creature who tries to be truthful and faithful to duty can possibly be guided. As your brothers have gone away, one by one, I have written to them such words as I am now writing to you, and have entreated them all to guide themselves by the Book.'

<sup>1</sup> Bishop Westcott.

<sup>2</sup> *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. ii., pp. 592, 607, 615.

1. *Through patience of the scriptures.*—This 'patience' is holy perseverance under trial, the patience which suffers and is strong, suffers and goes forward. Rich indeed are Pentateuch, and Prophets, and Hagiographa, both in commands to persevere and be of good courage, and in examples of men who were made brave and patient by the power of God in them, as they took Him at His word. And all this, says the Apostle, was on purpose, on God's purpose, that we also may learn to take Him at His word, to trust His plan concerning us.

When Robert Grosseteste was asked whence he had acquired his gentle, tactful, and courtly manners, the peasant's son, who had developed into the greatest man of his generation, is reported to have answered: 'It is true that I come of a humble father and mother, but from my earliest years I have studied the best men in the Scriptures, and have tried to conform my actions to theirs.'

2. *Through comfort of the scriptures.*—The word here used means more than 'consolation' though it includes consolation; it might be translated 'encouragement'; it means the voice of positive and enlivening appeal. The spirit of comfort is not so much that of a nurse as of an elder and braver comrade. The word in English is a strong word akin to fortitude, and the Greek original has a heartening, encouraging tone about it—the tone of a voice that calls to us like that of a friend, cheers us on, animates and invigorates us, as when the angel in Daniel's vision bids him not to fear, but to be strong. We call the Holy Spirit our Comforter; and although that is not an accurate rendering of the original word, which really means One who can be called to our side as a supporter, it does fairly represent, if we read it aright, the strengthening office of that Divine Friend beside us, whose presence at once commands and enables us to be strong and of a good courage. Comfort involves the renewal of energy, the recovery of lost or impaired force; it sets us on our feet again, it sends us back to our work with a fresh impulse: the very reason for which we are 'spoken to comfortably' is that we may rise up and go forth to meet the Lord, when He comes to us in all the might and love of the Ruler and the Shepherd.

Fancy a man thrown in upon himself, with no permitted music, nor relaxation, nor literature, nor secular conversation—nothing but his Bible, his own soul, and God's silence! What hearts of iron this system must have made. How different from our stuffed-arm-chair religion and a 'gospel

of comfort'! as if to be made comfortable were the great end of religion.<sup>1</sup>

Charlotte Brontë, in a letter to Miss Ellen Nussey, written on February 20, 1837, confessed: 'Last Sunday I took up my Bible in a gloomy frame of mind; I began to read; a feeling stole over me such as I have not known for many long years—a sweet, placid sensation like those that I remember used to visit me when I was a little child. . . . I thought of my own Ellen—I wished she had been near me that I might have told her how happy I was, how bright and glorious the pages of God's holy word seemed to me.'<sup>2</sup>

### III.

#### THE REWARD OF LEARNING.

##### 'That we might have hope.'

This is the promised reward of all our learning, 'the hope set before us.' The 'hope' spoken of here is the Christian hope, the hope of the glory of God; and the Christian has it as he is able, through the help of God's word in the Scriptures, to maintain a brave and cheerful spirit amid all the sufferings and reproaches of life. For hope has been worthily called 'the energy and effort of faith'; a 'real act of the will' and moral nature; a refusal 'to be cowed and depressed by evil'; unlike the mere buoyant exuberance of spirits which belongs to a sanguine disposition, too light-hearted to feel difficulties or understand perils,—it is such a gathering up of all the interior forces in deliberate reliance on God as can elevate, fortify, and inspire. We need it now, in days when some who pass for philosophers, but have given up the true 'wisdom,' preach a view of life which is hopeless and which, as it has been well said, can be met and overmatched only by the repression of atheism, whether professed or virtual. The question of hope for man is ultimately the question of a God for man, and indeed of man himself, as a moral and spiritual being.

1. *We find hope for ourselves*, in our present lives and in our final destiny. A man must have hope for himself first, if he is to have hope for others. If he wishes to have hope for the world, he must first have hope for himself, for he is in the world a part of it, and he must learn what blessings God intends for him, and they will teach him what blessings God has in store for the earth. Faith and hope, like charity, must begin at home.

<sup>1</sup> F. W. Robertson, *Life and Letters*, 211.

<sup>2</sup> Clement K. Shorter, *Charlotte Brontë and her Circle*, p. 213.

By learning the corruption of our own hearts we learn the corruption of human nature. By learning what is the only medicine which can cure our own sick hearts, we learn what is the only medicine which can cure human nature. We learn by our own experience, that God is all-forgiving love; that His peace shines bright upon the soul which casts itself utterly on Jesus Christ the Lord for pardon, strength, and safety; that God's Spirit is ready and able to raise us out of all our sin, and sottishness, and weakness, and wilfulness, and selfishness, and renew us into quite new men, different characters from what we used to be; and so, by having hope for ourselves, we learn step by step and year by year to have hope for our friends, for our neighbours, and for the whole world.

Her languid pulses thrill with sudden hope,  
That will not be forgot nor cast aside,  
And life in statelier vistas seems to ope,  
Illimitably lofty, long, and wide.  
What doth she know? She is subdued and mild,  
Quiet and docile 'as a weaned child.'

If grief came in such unimagined wise,  
How may joy dawn? In what undreamed-of hour  
May the light break with splendour of surprise,  
Disclosing all the mercy and the power?—  
A baseless hope, yet vivid, keen, and bright,  
As the wild lightning in the starless night.

She knows not whence it came, nor where it passed,  
But it revealed, in one brief flash of flame,  
A heaven so high, a world so rich and vast,  
That, full of meek contrition and mute shame,  
In patient silence hopefully withdrawn,  
She bows her head, and bides the certain dawn.<sup>3</sup>

2. *We gain hope for the world*. It is a deadly thing when the Christian allows himself to lose hope, when he allows himself to think that all is lost. Position after position seems to be taken. People say: 'Look at the educated world, they have forsaken you; they have taken your title-deeds, and found them to be faulty; they have examined your dogmatic utterances and found them to be incredible; they have taken the results on which you rely and have found other causes to account for them, with which religion has nothing to do. The educated world is against you, you are fighting for a lost cause if you hope to see the triumph of Christianity.' 'Your churches even are gone,' says the apostle of despair, 'you mourn in your sad penitential appeals for those who will not

<sup>3</sup> Emma Lazarus.

lament for sins in which they do not believe. You pipe in your solemn feasts to those who will not dance, and leave you clad in the robes of an æstheticism which has failed to attract, or decked with popular appeals which have failed to charm. Your very schools are gone,' continues our pitiless opponent; 'children are growing up who will revolt against the fetters which have kept their fathers in bondage too long.'

Yet, in spite of it all, Hope is still able to raise her voice, and also to make it heard, as it brings forward the encouragement, if it be but as a piece of floating seaweed, which tells us that the enterprise will yet be crowned with success. When the smoke of conflict rolls away, and there is a lull in the noise of battle, we see that we are not only in a position which is not hopeless, but in the midst of the orderly working of a well-recognized plan. If society has its sinners, society also has its saints. Those who know the inner life of the Church know its vigour and its triumphs; those who know her children know that Christ still takes them up in His arms and blesses them. If any one is tempted to despair let him follow the advice of St. Paul, let him consider the days of old and the years that are past, let him drink in patience and comfort from the Scriptures, for they will show him not only examples of those who waited for the Lord, and found His never-failing aid; but more than this, a plan which has never wavered, not even when all seemed to be lost, a plan which reached its crisis when those who waited for the consolation of Israel seemed to be only a handful of worn-out watchers. No purpose of God has failed, nothing once endued by Him with life will fail of some purpose in His Kingdom, stern though that purpose may become.

Both Testaments declare

(As here evinced) how blissful is their state,  
Ordned of God friendship with Him to share.

Isaiah says that in their native land

Each with a twofold vesture shall be dight;  
And by his words, this life I understand.  
The same more clearly hath thy Brother shown,  
When, speaking of the garments pure and white,  
This revelation he to us makes known.<sup>1</sup>

3. *Our hope is fulfilled in Christ.* The hope of the gospel is a hope of God in our Saviour Jesus Christ. It rests upon God's eternal counsel, which He has been working out ever since the world began, and which we can spell out piece by piece in the records of His book. The coming judge is none other than the Saviour; neither will His judgment be any new thing. He is judging every one of us at every moment; severing the good from the bad in us, and burning our chaff with fire unquenchable. We shall be more entirely filled with that Divine hope the more we strive to bring the thought of our Saviour and Judge to bear upon all our present doings. And if sorrow or want or any other trial presses us down now, and seems to make hope almost an impossibility, let us remember that it is through the patience and the comfort of the Scriptures that we are led on to Hope.

I have found something in the sky and sea  
Like to a mystic message partly heard,  
That speaks to me when all my soul is stirred  
By some far hope that lays its hands on me.  
When for a wider scope my heart makes plea,  
And frets at life like an imprisoned bird,  
There comes from star and wave a soothing word—  
The healing touch of earth's immensity.  
As to our childhood's eyes all heaven lay  
Just where the sea flowed through the Western gate.  
So for our life-dimmed sight some larger fate  
Gleams through the vista of the dying day:  
It is God's word to us that soon or late,  
Where the heart leads the feet shall find a way.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Dante, *Paradiso*, xxv. 88-96 (tr. by Wright).

<sup>2</sup> Percy C. Ainsworth, *Poems and Sonnets*, 67.