

VIEW FROM THE TOWER.

"WHERE are we?" is the significant question now troubling the thinking portion of Christendom, and occasionally propounded through the religious and secular press. The question has been suggested by the manifest absurdities of the old creeds and the clash of new speculative philosophies, producing such confusion that it is impossible for many to determine just where they stand.

The perplexity of the situation is very manifest from the following remarks which appeared recently in the *New York Sun*: –

"And so the drift goes on, until little by little the question: 'Where are we?' becomes a pregnant religious one. Professors sit in the chairs of seminaries teaching doctrines far enough removed from the originals to make the ancient benefactors turn in their graves; clergymen sign pledges on ordination which they probably know the administrator does not believe himself; the standards are in many cases only the buoys which show how far the ships of the churches have got away from the mapped-out channels. It is the age of go as you please, of every man for himself, and all that. Nobody knows where it is all to end, and those who are interested most seem to care least."

This may be regarded by some as merely a pessimistic view of the case; but it is not. The writer has not expressed it nearly so strong as the facts would warrant. Within the past three years the tendency toward open infidelity has been amazingly on the increase in both the pulpits and pews of Christendom; and now the boldest strike is being made, not only against the doctrines of the Bible, and against the doctrines set forth in the various creeds, but against the Bible itself as a divinely inspired revelation.

Failing to see in it God's plan of the ages and all its varied corroborative testimony as one harmonious whole, and seeing its inharmony on every other line of interpretation, the conclusion is rapidly being reached, and that by eminent clergymen, too, that the Bible is not a divinely inspired book; and with great boldness they are so openly declaring it that thinking people in amazement are inquiring, Whither are we drifting?

The recent controversy in the case of Dr. Briggs has done much to accelerate the movement toward infidelity: for, though the Presbyterian General Assembly has declared against him, he is regarded by many as a very martyr for truth. The Rev. Lyman Abbott, successor to Henry Ward Beecher, ranks him as a prophet, and a worthy successor of the prophets of old. But for this it is not at all necessary in his estimation that he should be in harmony with the prophets of the Bible; for Dr. Abbott has no more respect for the Bible than for many other books. Quoting the common **[R1584 : page 291]** belief – "The Bible is the Word of God!" he replies, "Oh, I beg your pardon, the Bible is not the Word of God. I challenge any man who calls the Bible the Word of God to find that phrase, the Word of God, ever used in the Bible." "The Bible [he says] is itself the product of the church, and the church is the product of the individual experience. **[R1584 : page 292]** First comes the individual consciousness of God, and then out of all the gathered consciousness of God there comes the institution of religion, the church; and then out of the life of the church and its ministry comes the literature of religion, the Bible." His order of authority would therefore be (1) the individual consciousness of God, (2) the church, and (3) the Bible.

Of course, then, Dr. Briggs and Dr. Abbott and many other eminent divines (?) are quite on a par with all the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament apostles, according to this theory.

But Dr. Abbott is not the only one who thus boldly repudiates the Word of God: others, too, are gaining courage by such examples, and these sentiments bid fair to be the popular ones in a very short time. The Rev. Dr. Campbell, a professor in the Presbyterian college of Montreal, Canada, recently delivered a lecture before the students on "The perfect book, or the perfect Father," in which he boldly assailed the Bible as a mass of contradictions, not fairly or truthfully representing the character and plan of God, and consequently not an infallible rule of faith. And now this gentleman's course is likely to raise as stiff a breeze in Canada as that of Dr. Briggs has raised in this country, the matter having been already referred to the General Assembly there.

Another reverend (?) gentleman, Mr. Horton, who has written a volume on "The Inspiration of the Bible," and another on "Revelation and the Bible," said recently, in a lecture to the divinity students of Yale College, that he objected to the current practice of preachers calling the Bible the Word of God. He had no toleration for what he termed a strange birth of time, "the cult of Bibliolatry." He said it was due to truth and honesty for preachers "to deliver the church from the confusion and mischief and error which have been incurred by this one baseless notion, that a book written by human pens and handed down by human methods, transcribed, translated and compiled by fallible human minds, is, or can be as such, the Word of God."

It matters little how presbyteries, synods and assemblies deal with these men and their views: they cannot silence them. The rising generation of theological students is under their influence, and many who have quietly held such views are now encouraged to give expression to them. But the most notable outgrowth of these sentiments is what is called The New American Bible, now in course of preparation under the direction of Prof. Haupt of the Johns Hopkins University, the contributors (Prof. Briggs being

among them) all representing the school of the so-called higher criticism, which repudiates the commonly accepted view of divine inspiration; and the attempt is to reconstruct the Scriptures from their standpoint.

Thus the authority of the Scriptures is assailed in high places, and the question, Whither are we drifting? is indeed a pregnant one in Christendom. The drift is unmistakable. The rapids of skepticism are fast hurrying on toward the final plunge into open infidelity; and "who shall be able to stand?" This is the day when "the fire shall try every man's work, of what sort it is;" and it behooves every child of God to fortify his faith with all the evidences which the Lord has graciously supplied to enable us to stand in this evil day.

We would therefore commend to our readers a careful review of the first three chapters of MILLENNIAL DAWN, VOL. I., and the articles in the TOWER on "The Law of God" (Nov. 1, '92) and "The Calling, Office and Authority of the Twelve Apostles" (May 1, '93). And let us notice further that the Scriptures do claim to be the Word of God, though their authority by no means depends upon the finding of that expression in the Scriptures, as Dr. Abbott seems to intimate. See Luke 4:4; 5:1; 8:21; Acts 4:31; 8:14; 11:1; 13:44; Rom. 9:6; 10:17; 2 Cor. 2:17; 4:2; Eph. 6:17; 2 Tim. 2:9; Titus 2:5; Heb. 4:12; 6:5; 13:7; Rev. 1:2; 11:3.

It is a great mistake to affirm that the Bible is the product of the Church; and those who make this claim do not know where to look for the Church. The Scriptures declare that Jesus Christ was the *head* and *forerunner* of [R1584 : page 293] the Church; and if he was the forerunner it is plain that none of the members of the Church preceded him, and, therefore, that the Old Testament Scriptures – which Paul says "were written aforetime (before Christ's advent) for our instruction that we through patience and

the consolation of the Scriptures might possess the hope" (of the gospel – Rom. 15:4) – were not the product of the Church. And if, as we have shown, the writings of the Apostles were divinely inspired, then the New Testament Scriptures are not the product of the Church. But consecrated human agencies were used in both cases as God's honored instruments. The word of the Lord through the Apostles is not the product of the Church, but of divine revelation. And never since those inspired apostles fell asleep has the church been able to add one iota to the heavenly wisdom revealed through them; and to whatever extent she has wandered from their teachings, she has manifested her folly by vain philosophies which expose her ignorance and egotism.

Nor is the Church, as Dr. Abbott claims, the product of individual experience or consciousness of God; for, apart from the Word of God, we have no acquaintance with him. We are sanctified by the truth of God's Word, is the way the Lord expresses it (John 17:17), not that the Word of God is the product of our previous sanctification without the truth. The Word of God, therefore, is the only real authority of divine truth; and neither the Church collectively, nor church councils, nor the individual members of it, except the twelve divinely inspired ones, are any authorities.

It is claimed by some that the Church has exercised the authority of deciding and declaring which of the various ancient writings properly belong to the sacred code as we now possess it. But the claim is utterly fallacious. Concerning this claim let us observe how the facts stand, and note how manifestly the great Head of the Church has supervised this matter. The same divine providence which communicated the truth to the prophets, both by natural and supernatural means, was just as capable of preserving and, later, of compiling those documents; and in both cases the human agents were only the instruments in his hands, whether knowingly and willingly or not.

The Old Testament Scriptures were all carefully and religiously preserved by the Jews down to the inauguration of the Christian dispensation, and then their testimony was carefully interwoven by Christ and his inspired apostles with the further developments of divine truth due in the new dispensation of the Gospel age. And they are freely quoted and referred to by them as of divine authority, while the New Testament writings are presented as supplemental to them and of equal authority and divine inspiration; and all bear the one harmonious testimony.

The various books being thus linked together, so that if one were lost others would indicate the loss, and if a false one were supplied it would lack such indorsements and its inharmony would be manifest, it is easily seen that no human authority was necessary to make up the canon of Scripture. It is divinely indicated; and we would be very obtuse not to be able to recognize it, even if those writings were lying around loosely and separately. Those who compiled the Scriptures merely did what we could do to-day without their aid: they read the mutual indorsements of the Lord and the apostles and prophets. But while we do not accord to them any authority or special wisdom in the matter, we do gratefully accept the compilation as a providential aid to our study of the complete Scriptures, in the same way that we also accept the still more recent helps of concordances, etc.

And all of these providential helps have aided in the discovery in the Scriptures of the divine plan of the ages, which links them all together as parts of one harmonious whole which cannot be broken. Without the aid of the compilation of the Scriptures and its systematic division into chapters and verses for convenience of reference, and the valuable aid of complete concordances in the comparison of scripture with scripture, humanly speaking, we would at least be at great disadvantage, if indeed we could at all have arrived at an exact knowledge of the plan of God. God, who works by means, and who uses human

instrumentalities [R1584 : page 294] when adapted to his service, wisely and graciously had all this preparatory work done for us before the due time came for the full discovery and understanding of his plan of the ages. And we rejoice and give thanks to God, and highly esteem every consecrated and honored human instrumentality which has facilitated our progress in the knowledge of the truth, though we recognize them merely as the instruments of a wise over-ruling providence which carefully comprehended, and carefully adjusted, all the various means to the accomplishment of his purpose in the full enlightenment of his elect "in due time," "the time of the end." – Dan. 12:10.

Those who lack the evidence of the plan of the ages to the inspiration of the Bible lack the strongest testimony of all, and the time is very near when none will be able to stand the searching tests of this day of the Lord who are not amply supported by its strength. Praise the Lord for his keeping power: "his truth is our shield and buckler:" it is a network of testimony that cannot be broken.
