

many thousand variations, how do we know that there are not many thousand more which have not yet been detected?

This question must be solved before we are prepared to admit that the Bible is a sufficient guide, and has done away with the necessity of further revelation.

But we will pass by the difficulties thus far pointed out. We will suppose that we have settled beyond doubt the number of books to be accepted as canonical. We will suppose that the original text has been preserved, and that the translations thereof in our vernacular tongues are correct. All this we suppose, and yet we will find the greatest difficulty exists—that of understanding the sacred volume correctly. Indeed, this difficulty is so great that probably not one single man now living can understand it all, and those that understand part of it might do so by the aid of the Spirit of God.

Some of the difficulties in understanding even the translations of the Bible may now be pointed out.

It is admitted that the words used in the Scriptures are sometimes to be used in a figurative sense and sometimes in a literal sense. What words are, in each case, to be understood strictly and what figuratively must be left to the judgment of the reader. And from this fact numerous errors have arisen.

People have sometimes allegorized where no allegory was intended, as Origen in reading that Abraham in his old age married Keturah. Now, he says, the word Keturah means "sweet odor," and "sweet odor" refers to the fragrance of righteousness. Hence he concludes that Abraham in his old age became very pious or righteous, and that this fact is meant when Moses states that the Patriarch married Keturah. Equally absurd is the following *la Swedenborg*: "Adam represents the intellect and Eve the feeling. That Adam and Eve begat sons and daughters means, therefore, that the union between intellect and feeling is what produces knowledge in man." These instances are extremely absurd and the errors of this kind of interpretation are easily perceived. But sometimes the errors are not so palpable, although equally absurd. As for instance, when it is contended that the "kingdom" of Christ means a religion and not a real kingdom, or that "the first resurrection" mean a revival of the principles for which the martyrs were killed. In such cases the errors are great, and hundreds of Bible-readers commit just such errors, in many instances without even knowing it.

Then, sometimes words that are really used figuratively are understood literally. You will see paintings, occasionally, where Lazarus is enjoying his heavenly bliss by sitting in the lap ("the bosom") of Father Abraham, the artist having misunderstood the figurative expression used by our Lord.

This kind of error is more easily committed in reading the prophetic portions of the Bible. The Prophets borrow words denoting

natural objects in order to represent what is spiritual and abstract. Their books are, so to speak, hieroglyphical, although they do not draw their hieroglyphic pictures, as did the Egyptian priests, but they describe them in words. Hence the great difficulty in interpreting prophecy. It is not less difficult than to interpret many ancient Egyptian records. The Prophets, for instance, talk of a "horn" and mean a "crown" or a "kingdom." "Beast" is a usurping tyrannical power. "Key" stands for lawful authority. "Virgins" are faithful worshippers, not defiled by idolatry.

Generally it must be borne in mind that every word should be understood as it was commonly understood at the time the Bible was written. Much minute inquiry, in fact more than most people are prepared to give, is needed in order to avoid errors arising from a violation of this rule.

Sometimes a knowledge of Hebrew and Greek is absolutely necessary for the right understanding of a passage. In 1 Kings ii:8, 9 David is made to say concerning Simei: "Hold him not guiltless, * * but his hoary head bring down with blood to the grave." But David had sworn not to kill Simei. It seems therefore as if one of the last acts of David was to break his oath and his royal word. But a knowledge of Hebrew idiom clears this up; for the word "not" refers to both clauses: "Hold him not guiltless, * * but bring not his hoary head down with blood." That is the meaning, and Solomon understood it so. "The end of the world" spoken of in Matt. xxiv:3 a Greek scholar will discover to be not the end of the physical world (*telos tou kosmou*), but the termination of the then existing economy; for the words are *synteleia tou aionos*. The interpretation of the whole prophecy of our Lord hangs upon this one word. Matthew (xii:40) makes Christ say: "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly," whereas the fact is, that there is not, and probably never was, a whale in the Mediterranean. The Hebrew has "a great fish" (Jonah i:17), which the translators of the Septuagint made into a whale, and the misleading quotation slipped into the New Testament from the Septuagint.

Sometimes people put a mystical sense into the most plain expression. Christ says: "But one thing is needful" (Luke x:42), and many an edifying sermon has been preached upon this one "needful thing," and much curiosity has been needlessly excited to know what that one needful thing is that in itself is necessary and sufficient to salvation. People have been so eager to make a mystery that they have forgotten the fact that Christ for the time does not refer to salvation at all, but is speaking of a much more trivial subject, yet not less interesting or noteworthy. Christ has called on His friends, Lazarus, Martha and Maria. The two ladies are both anxious to serve Him to the best of their ability. But Martha seems to have had an idea that lots

of things were necessary in order to make a comfortable meal. In order to be ready in a hurry Martha wanted her sister to help her, upon which the Savior politely remarks that, "only one thing is needful." There was no cause for so much serving. He would not enter their house a stranger for whom they would have to prepare so many extra dishes. He would come as their friend and be entertained as such. This would give both sisters time to sit down and listen to His instructions, which after all was the "good part" of the entertainment. Stripping this narrative of the mysteries of theologians and letting common sense be common sense, we have a beautiful incident at once pleasing and instructive.

Sometimes the reader will be misled by the numbers of the Bible, because he does not know how they originally were used. "Ten" sometimes stands for "several." In Gen. xxxi: 7, Jacob says that Laban had changed his wages "ten times," meaning of course, "several times." Perhaps the division of the Roman Empire into "ten" as predicted by Daniel ought to be understood in the same way, since so far no one has been able exactly to tell in what "ten" (the word taken literally) kingdoms that empire on its downfall was divided. If understood to mean "several" kingdoms, there is no difficulty. "Forty," in the same way, often means "many." "Seven" and "seventy" denote a large and complete number, although uncertain to the speaker.

Sometimes a knowledge of history is required for the right understanding of passages. (Acts ix, 31): "The churches had rest throughout all Judea and Galilee" has been misunderstood as a consequence of the conversion of Paul, whereas the real cause of this temporary rest was that at this time Caligula attempted to raise a statue of himself in the "Holy of holies" in the temple. The consternation which this caused among the bloodthirsty Jews made them for a time to forget the Christian Churches.

Nor less important is a knowledge of ancient chronology, geography, of botany, of mineralogy, zoology, and archaeology in its various branches. But we cannot here multiply instances.

To understand the Bible, even the plainest translation, all these things are necessary as helps, and yet, without the Spirit of God to lead into all truth, not all of these helps are sufficient; so numerous and so vast are the difficulties to be encountered in ascertaining the true meaning of the Bible.

J. M. S.

[To be continued.]

PITTSBURG, May 31.—President Harrison and party arrived this morning, were received by the mayor and military, and driven to an hotel.

The President subsequently held a reception at the exposition building. Three thousand shook hands with him. He was the guest of the Scotch-Irish Congress.