

“WHICH THINGS ARE AN  
ALLEGORY.”

—*Galatians iv. 24.*



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"WHICH things are an allegory," said St. Paul, but who believes him? If modern expounders of Holy Writ would say so too, what a blessed change would come o'er the spirit of our Bible! but no, everything must be taken literally. Abraham, "the friend of God," listens to his spiteful wife and turns his own child out of doors to perish, for aught he knew, in the wilderness with poor Hagar, while we are called upon to admire this pattern of believers and to thank God that his edifying sayings and doings have been transmitted to posterity. Ask any Sunday-school scholar who Hagar and Ishmael were, and you will soon see that St. Paul has spoken in vain and that every child in the kingdom is taught to look upon Hagar and Ishmael as real people. Three hundred foxes all stood still "so nice and pretty" to have their tails set on fire (the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals is of later date) and full-grown men are required to hear the "inspired" narrative with holy awe, for Samson was a type of Christ, and though St. Paul might consider such things "an allegory," they were a dread reality to the foxes and the Philistines. God took such a lively interest in Ezekiel's culinary

arrangements that He desired him to bake his cakes with human excrement, and we are required to read the filthy statement with becoming gravity and to exclaim "How unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past finding out!"

Christians fail to see how wofully they are dishonouring God by their acceptance of a series of puerile fables alike unworthy of God and man; they have less light than St. Paul, who saw in these things "an allegory." Jews are supposed to have as much reverence for the Bible as Christians; but those on terms of intimacy with Jews—good strict Jews—who see them in the family circle and have frequent opportunities of studying them, are surprised and sometimes shocked at the very familiar use they make of Biblical expressions in ordinary conversation. "Here I am, for thou calledst me," as Samuel said to Eli; "I am not eloquent," as Moses said to Adonai; "Why eatest thou not?" as Elkanah said to Hannah, etc. At first these constant allusions to a book Christians generally reserve for private perusal, and from which they rarely quote save on solemn occasions, seem rather irreverent; but to many Jews the Scriptures are literally household words; whether in their case familiarity has bred contempt they are too cautious to discover. They certainly make very free and easy use of them, and are very fond of Bible riddles:—Which was the straightest man in the Bible? Joseph, so they made him a ruler; which was the rudest girl in the Bible? Ruth, because she uncovered Boaz's feet and trod on his corn, etc. But strict, devout Christians take a very solemn view of the Bible; poor Samson, with his pretty game of foxes' tails, cannot win a smile from them. True, Sarah laughed at God himself and was not punished, but Christians dare not laugh at Ezekiel and his inviting repast lest God should be angry; for though

David tells them that "His anger endureth but a moment," even *they* know better; an unchangeable being cannot be serene one minute and furious the next; once angry always angry, so we had better not laugh; for though Sarah got off, poor Michal was severely punished for what *we* should call commendable ridicule of an indecent young man whose latter days were in perfect harmony with the indecorous scene which excited Michal's contempt and derision and which cost her the joys of maternity. Christians never permit themselves to realise the scenes they read so often with such imperturbable gravity, and extremely interesting would it be to study the effect produced upon both Jew and Gentile by a modern Rabbi or Bishop who should conduct himself like Saul, David, or Ezekiel. When the Jews of old saw Saul quite naked they at once concluded that the Spirit of the Lord had come upon him and that he was "among the prophets." Would the modern Jews come to the same favourable conclusion if the Chief Rabbi at St. Helen's were to act in the same manner?

No wonder there are infidels and atheists. Christians are unwittingly fighting against themselves, their Bible, and their God. By their ignorance, bigotry, and superstition, they are alienating more and more gentle and devotional souls who have no innate tendency towards infidelity, but who find in the current theology nothing elevating, edifying, or encouraging. Good well-meaning Christians are daily driving earnest inquirers into the boundless and attractive realms of free-thought, whereas, if their very rational questions could be sensibly, if not altogether satisfactorily answered, many of them might retain the main tenets of a faith from which they have reluctantly drifted away never again to return.

We may ask or guess Bible riddles, which, though not approved, may be endured, but we may *not* ask Bible questions in which there is no facetious element without being suspected or even positively accused of having “got a twist.” Ask in a spirit of earnest inquiry where Mrs. Cain came from; how God fulfilled His promise to Ahab of bringing him back a glorious conqueror; whether the command given to Hosea really came from God;—you will be told that “it is not for us to pry into God’s mysteries,” and that, “if you go on like that you will soon be an infidel.” In all probability you *will* “go on like that,” and you will be an infidel, but who is to blame? Surely not those who wish to “prove all things and to hold fast that which is good,” rather those who would gloss over everything and hold fast much that is bad. The chief spoke in the religious wheel is indisputably the Bible, and how it is that the religious world is blind to a fact so obvious is wholly incredible. Holy and zealous people might so easily and so gracefully avail themselves of the loop-hole afforded by St. Paul, “Which things are an allegory;” but no! Jacob really came to fisty-cuffs with Almighty God, and would have done for him had not God hit upon a tender part of his body to grip hold of, and thus got free! Moses really was favoured with a private view of what the unscrupulous writer of the Pentateuch irreverently alludes to as God’s “back parts,”—words which *uninspired* writers hesitate to quote, which they would willingly soften down, but which students are forced to admit are correctly translated from the supposed original. Some of the language made use of in the Bible is so offensive to occidental ears that it would be an immense relief to discover a mis-translation or an interpolation which might save the reputation of the writers and screen the volume from the attacks of the enemy; however it is of no use to talk in this strain to the orthodox, to whom

the whole volume is the "Word of God," and consequently must not be tampered with. It is of no use to tell them that Moses could not have seen what God has not got to show, "*parts*," and that no whale could possibly swallow even a boy. They will tell you that "with God all things are possible," and that child-like faith is all that is required of us. If the blessed day should ever dawn (as God grant it may) when the so-called Word of God shall be sifted as wheat and purged of its dross, what a tiny volume will remain! But that they did it in ignorance, a heavy load of guilt lies at the Christians' door. They have well-nigh smothered their God with Bibles, and have so effectually concealed his parental attributes, that they have succeeded in literally stamping out the idea of him in many a gentle and noble mind. A coarse, vulgar, revengeful God will not do for a refined, susceptible, and forgiving man. Cultivated people must have a cultivated God. The Old Testament God may have done well enough for people in ancient times, but in these days we cannot respect a God who "hisses," swears in his wrath, curses, "is furious," enjoys the "sweet savour" of burning bullocks, shows his "back parts" to his favourites, and commands the wholesale slaughter of women and children. We want a God less like a devil than the bogy of the Old Testament. "Better," as Bacon says, "to have no opinion of God at all than one that is unworthy of him." But, unfortunately, people do not agree with Bacon any more than they do with St. Paul, and they strenuously resist any attempt to set a more dignified deity before their eyes, quite satisfied to adore what, by a happy inconsistency, they would shrink from imitating. However, there is a ray of hope gently glimmering from Natal. In the sixty-fifth Report of the Swedenborg Society recently published we read that Bishop Colenso "has intimated his willingness to accept copies of such



works as the Society might be pleased to grant him,” and the Rev. Thomas L. Marsden trusts that the one entitled “Conjugal Love” will be included in those selected; the Report adds “It is to be hoped that the Bishop will be led by the light shed on the letter of the Word in these works to see his way out of the difficulties which a literal interpretation has presented to his mind, and also to realise the truth that the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.” These things we sincerely hope are *not* “an allegory,” we should be unaffectedly sorry if by any oversight “Conjugal\* Love” should be omitted in the list prepared for Colenso. We hope it and all the seer’s lucid works already grace his book-shelves, for with such a man as Swedenborg for a master what may we not expect from such a pupil as Colenso!

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\* So spelt in Swedenborg’s book.

