

CYRIL.

Struck with the monotony of Lorenzo, Cyril determines to be varied in style. He aims at originality, and to accomplish this he has an infallible receipt,—that of spiritualizing the Bible. I do not mean that he draws out the spiritual sense which really exists but that he spiritualizes facts and words. For instance he explains that the clay which our Lord took in his hands, represents the sinful state of man; Jesus being in a boat while the people stood on the shore shows the distance between the divine and human nature, and so on. Under this treatment, the Bible soon disappears.

History, psalms, prophecy, epistles, all are thrown into one mass, and from this chaos Cyril draws at hasard, at if he were dealing with the pieces of a puzzle which, by dexterous manipulation, will finally fit in. Under pretence of spiritualizing, which to small minds is very easy and very amusing, he nulifies the word of God, and

turns it into a kaleidoscope, which at every revolution, presents a new picture. Yes, Cyril, look at it well, and describe what you see; if any one doubts, tell him you are spiritualizing the passage; taken literally, it would have meant just the contrary.

I must confess I am very suspicious of such spiritualizers. It is true that Paul say's "the letter killeth, and the spirit giveth life," and Jesus declares that "his words are spirit and life;" but honestly Cyril, does Master or Apostle use the word in the sense you do? I think not. We will investigate their meaning and compare it with yours, but permit me first a brief digression.

Figures of speech are necessary to all human language; this marks at once its poverty and its richness. Its poverty, for an exact word is wanting to express the new idea; its richness, for the images and colouring borrowed from nature, give to abstract ideas a fixity and brillance they would otherwise lack : thus the artifice of imagination turns weakness into strength.

Every word formerly contained a figure; unnoticed now, but quite perceptible at the time it first came into use. This is true even of words which express immaterial things; *attention*, *reflection*, referred to bodies before being applied to mind.

But though language be but an accumulation of images, no one is misled by it; every body understand the same phrase in the same sense : or if not, it is owing, not to the imperfections of language, but to obscurity in the writer, or want of intelligence in the reader. Let the reader then be instructed or the phrase amended, for the latter can only be said to be correct when it presents the same sense to all reasonable people. We must however bear in mind that while a perfect phrase is one in meaning, and devoid of all ambiguity, it is yet composed of figurative expressions.

A good writer is one who employs a style of imagery which is perfectly comprehensible, and presents but one meaning to the mind. This is generally admitted, and Cyril himself would be very sorry to deny it in other matters. If his correspondents, his debtors or his lawyer informed him that the letters, bills or deeds which he had received in good faith from them, were not to be understood literally but figuratively, be assured Cyril would be as much amazed as displeased. As a general rule then, we are agreed that all language, however full of imagery, must be understood in its primary or most evident, in a word, in its natural sense.

Now Cyril, in pity tell me why men speaking as

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from God himself, should specially select language which would be considered defective if they spoke for themselves? Why do you suppose that God in dealing with men should do precisely what men seek to avoid? Is it because there is a difference between his sayings and ours? But then would he not adapt the words to the new ideas, and not perplex us by using the same words in different senses? In denying what we affirm, surely, He would use a simple no, and not a spiritual yes, which was to be understood as no?

But Cyril still tells me that the language of the Bible being divine, and that of all other books human, there must necessarily exist between them an immense difference, and he thence concludes that a natural sense is suited to an earthly writer, and a spiritual sense to a heavenly one.

Gently, my friend; you are putting me off with empty words. Any language whatever, is employed, not with reference to the speaker, but the hearer. Were an angel sent to this world with words of warning, do you suppose he would speak other than the language of earth? We may fairly expect that any book destined for man, were it traced by the finger of God himself, would necessarily speak our language.

This distinction is very simple, but most essen-

tial; by overlooking it, men make the Bible contradict itself, seeming to express exactly the contrary of what it means. And the plea, forsooth, is, that it is the word of God! Truly yes; God speaks in the Bible, but it is to His creature that he speaks. It is plain that the images employed in scripture are introduced, as in all other books, for the purpose of elucidation not mystification; and that the true sense of the Bible is that which presents itself most readily to the mind.

My imaginative friend is not convinced; he comes however half way, and says, “I grant you that the Bible has a literal meaning, but you must admit the spiritual one also, for you know there is a double meaning in scripture which.....” Stop, Cyril; I cannot suffer you to proceed. I told you I mistrusted your spiritualizing system; but your double meaning I most solemnly repudiate. To admit it would be to doubt the truth of God, to play with his word, and by vainly attempting to enhance the value of divine truth to render it absolutely null and void.

If the Bible has two meanings, why not three, four, fifty, or a hundred? Where are we to stop? If the first supposed ten do not suit me, why should I not seek an eleventh, that is why should I not give my own?

This alas, is no impossibility, as the records of history tell. We know of mystics who have given ten or fifteen different interpretations to the Bible, admiring their dexterity in proportion to the difficulty of the task. If a barrister or magistrate dealt thus with human laws, would not so dangerous a legislator be sent to a Lunatic Asylum? Preachers have indeed the privilege of saying what they please without interruption; but Cyril, you must not abuse this privilege, consider that God will call you to account for what your hearers are obliged to let pass unquestioned, and one day you may tremble at being reminded by Him of these words of his Apostle, that his yea was yea and his nay was nay. It is true that the old Testament is sometimes quoted in the new, in a manner which seems to imply the double accomplishment of a prediction. This is not the place for a theological discussion on the subject; I will only say that the supposed second accomplishments are more applications of old words to new events. We do this constantly ourselves, when we borrow the words of old authors to illustrate modern facts; but we never pretend that these authors wrote in a double sense, nor have we any excuse for so doing.
