

ing the earth. Ere long it will be to him like a rifled and abandoned mine. Whatever prophecy therefore he has within himself of a better state, points upward into the deep, eternal heavens. When he has exhausted the terrestrial geology, the celestial astronomy offers him for a while an observatory and a home.

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## ARTICLE IV.

## ESSAY ON INSPIRATION.

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It is noticed by a late writer in the North British Review, as a prominent and remarkable feature in the controversy respecting Inspiration, that "in the vocabulary of recent discussions the terms *revelation* and *inspiration* have so entirely changed their significance as to mean the very opposite, well nigh, of what they meant before;" and he adds that "under the shelter of this ambiguity, a considerable portion of the argument or declamation of recent opponents of Scripture infallibility, amounts to not much more than an attempt, — oftentimes a dexterous, though it may be an unconscious one, — to shift the conditions of the problem and misstate the *status questionis*." How far this representation may be true as to fact, we are not concerned at present to inquire; but of the evil which must unavoidably result, in discussing the question of inspiration, from looseness or ambiguity in the use of the most important terms relating to the subject, we do not entertain a doubt. At the same time, the laying down of definitions for which the way has not been prepared by some previous opening of the subject in hand, showing their necessity, seems to us a rather unsatisfactory mode of proceeding, except within the domain of pure science. We shall not, therefore, at the beginning of this essay,

undertake to give a precise definition either of the term *revelation* or *inspiration*, but, taking them both for the present in the somewhat vague, but for our immediate purpose sufficiently distinct, sense in which they have ever been used by believers and unbelievers in common, when affirming or denying a source of divine knowledge higher than any furnished by the light of nature, we shall first speak of revelation as an historical fact which has been recognized in all ages of the world, and attempt to show the necessity of admitting the truth of this fact, in order to a satisfactory explanation of the grand course of events shadowed forth by history from the beginning.

The general fact of the recognition of a revelation, and the necessity in this particular case of supposing the reality of that which has always been recognized, having been clearly established on historical grounds, it will then be time to inquire more minutely into the nature of inspiration, and in so doing to lay down all the distinctions which may be found necessary for the purpose of showing how it differs from revelation and from everything else with which it ever has been, or is likely to be, confounded.

Our fundamental position then is this: that revelation, or if you please inspiration, in the sense of a direct communication of religious truth from God to man, is a fact which has been recognized in all ages of the world; and then, that it is a fact the truth of which must be allowed in order to account, in any satisfactory manner, for the actual course of events in the history of our race. It shall be our endeavor to be as brief on both parts of this preliminary proposition as may be consistent with a clear statement of the argument. To establish the first part of it, no further evidence need be required than that which is furnished by the Scriptures themselves. Of course, we shall not be understood as speaking here of the testimony of Scripture to its own inspiration, but of its testimony to the point that an express revelation from God, as opposed to nature, religion, and mythology, has ever been recognized and believed to exist, by some portion of mankind. Let the truth be as it may with

regard to the *reality* of the fact, the belief of the fact through all time, as far back as history reaches, surely will not be called in question by any one who admits the authority of Scripture as a trustworthy historical record. That God, at sundry times and in divers manners *from the beginning*, spake unto the fathers by the prophets; that this is a statement of Scripture which expresses the common conviction of the devout men of both the Old and New Testament; that each sacred writer, in referring to the other Scriptures, speaks of them in a style evincing the sincerity and firmness of his own belief, to say the least, that the Scriptures to which he appeals are the infallible Word of God, — are positions which no person that we ever heard of has pretended to dispute. All admit, we suppose, that, as the Scriptures stand, they *plainly purport* to be nothing less nor other than an unbroken series of the oracles of God, from the revelation to the first man to the appearance of the second, who is the Lord from heaven.

The testamentary Scriptures, moreover, give themselves out, not merely as being one species of direct revelation from God, but as being the only revelation of the kind which has ever been given to the world. The Scriptures recognize no other positive and authoritative declaration of the divine will and purposes to man, save their own. While they admit and teach that the human mind, left to itself, is not so utterly without light as not to be able to discern, if it would, the invisible things of God, even His eternal power and Godhead, manifested in the works of creation; while they admit and teach that those who have not the law as revealed by themselves, still show the work of the law written on their hearts and borne witness to by their consciences; and while they acknowledge the sufficiency of these lights, so far as is necessary to vindicate to natural conscience the divine justice in punishing all ungodliness and all unrighteousness of men, — they yet distinctly set themselves over against this light of nature, as being themselves another, altogether different, altogether higher, more direct and more explicit, revelation of divine truth to man, — at the same

time affirming their own exclusive title to be considered as such a revelation. Thus much the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament indisputably claim for themselves; and that these claims have been admitted by some part of mankind in every age of the world, is as certain as that they have been put forth. It is a fact, therefore, standing prominently out in the history of our race, that there has been a series of communications, beginning from the earliest times, professing to come, and believed to have come, directly from God, which has ever been as a light that shineth in a dark place, and with a brightness gradually increasing until the dawn of that day which its first and feeblest glimmering foretold, and to whose influence alone it can be ascribed that the knowledge of the true and living God has at no time been utterly lost out of the world.<sup>1</sup>

Second point in the proposition: there is no rational way of accounting for what we know from history respecting the religious conditions of mankind from the beginning, except by admitting these claims to be true and valid. Among the great facts of history, the most striking, as it must be confessed, on the whole, is this, — that through all the ages may be traced a strongly marked line of distinction, separating mankind, as to their religious notions, into two grand but very unequal divisions. All that belong to these divisions on both sides, however they may differ in other respects, wholly agree in the prevailing form, spirit, and tendency of their religions. In one, notions of the Divine Being, imperfect indeed, but, so far as they went, correct, and with time becoming ever more fully developed, clearly defined and powerfully influential on human character, have prevailed from the first; while the mythological and polytheistic or pantheistic, all tending alike to deterioration and to issue in that total extinction of the religious sense, which seems to have been the actual result in some cases, have

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<sup>1</sup> Other religions, it is true, claim also to be founded on direct revelation. But it is not simply the claim, it is the perpetuity, and perpetual recognition of the claim, that constitutes the peculiarity of Scripture revelation. In the words of Pascal, who felt the force of this fact: "Nulle autre religion n'a la perpétuité."

been uniformly the characteristic features of the other. As nations follow the fate of their religions, all the dead nations of the earth belonged to the latter division. The only surviving people of the past, — surviving in spite of their dispersion, — belong to the former. The nations that now virtually govern the world, confessedly owe all that distinguishes their condition from that of the other, feebler portions, to the influences, direct or indirect, of that Word which claims to be a revelation from God and from nothing else.

Now for the question. If that Word is not in fact what it claims to be; if that Word is itself but one form of development of natural reason and of the natural sense of religion belonging to the human creature, a very difficult problem presents itself, — a problem far more difficult to explain than any miraculous interposition of God to bring back an apostate race, created originally in His own image, to the knowledge of Himself. If man might be left to develop his religion simply out of such notions as he had already implicitly within him; if in fact Judaism and Christianity are but such a development in the natural order of things, what is to be said of the other and by far greater portion of mankind, whose religious history, by the confession of all, is neither more nor less than a history of man left to himself and to form his religion out of himself? Why should the constant law of the development of religious truth to consciousness, be in the one case progression, and the no less constant law in the other, be deterioration? Why should the clearing up of the human mind, to better and more satisfying views of God and of His truth, be confined to one particular portion of mankind and forbidden to the other? Why should it be confined precisely to that portion which has always claimed to possess a revelation from the one and only true God, and be found wanting among that portion which have never, in the same sense, claimed any such thing? These questions cannot be fairly answered by deniers of revelation in the old, legitimate sense. Neither can the great facts upon the ground of which these questions are

put, be denied or blinked. It has indeed been attempted to weaken their force, by appealing to the sublime views of God and of man's relations to God, arrived at by a few pagan philosophers, and latterly, to the grand speculations and lofty morality to be found in some of the so-called sacred books of the East. But frankly look at them. What, in good truth, have they ever effected? What have they done for the regeneration of human nature? What safe foundation have they pointed out for our most earnest aspirations? What have they done to clear up the problem of human existence and to justify our hopes with regard to a hereafter? What one sufficient and truly peace-bringing solution have they ever offered to the perplexing doubts of the sin-burdened conscience? But to supply just these wants is the very end of religion according to its true idea; and whatever may be said of other books, there is but *one* in which this end is made supreme, and in which the solution of these questions is aimed at from the beginning, and finally so completely realized to every need of human nature as to leave nothing to be desired.<sup>1</sup>

Such being the difference between the religious knowledge embodied in the myths and speculations of ancient wisdom, and that which Scripture, without any parade of speculation, plainly reveals from the beginning; and such being the results of the teachings on both sides, namely, decided failure to check sin and renew humanity in the one case, and comparative success in the other, the question returns with new force: how to account for this difference on the supposition that the Scriptures are not really what they claim to be, but merely another form of the natural development of the religious consciousness of mankind? The instinct which impels us to seek a sufficient reason for every phenomenon, and which will not permit us to ascribe appearances differing in their whole manifestation to one and

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<sup>1</sup> Toute religion est vraie en quelque point. Vraie, sinon comme pensée divine, du moins comme pensée humaine. Et sous ce rapport, toute religion est une révélation. Mais celle-là seule est la vraie qui, d'un côté, a posé toutes les questions, et de l'autre, a répondu à toutes. — *Vinet*.

the same cause, cannot be satisfied by such a supposition. In truth, the more we try to make a serious application of this theory to explain the religious history of mankind, the more we must be convinced of its utter incompetency. The further we go back with it, to where its application ought to be the easiest, the more palpably it fails us. Instead of explaining anything, it embarrasses everything. In attempting to explain everything without a miracle, it involves everything in a more perplexing maze, in which we may grope in vain to find a possible beginning for that religion which alone, of all the systems that are called such, truly deserves the name. To put this religion, so evidently divine in all its teachings, so purifying in all its influences, so grand and glorious in its effects even as they appear here in time, into the same category with the dark, enigmatical and — as they eventually proved, whatever of truth they may have embodied at first — the superstitious and polluting mythologies of the nations, is so contrary to the first impressions that force themselves upon every reflecting mind, calmly looking at the facts, that it seems unaccountable how such a thing should ever have suggested itself to any serious inquirer after truth, or what motive could exist for it, except some invincible prejudice against the very idea of a positive religion. For ourselves, we have no doubt that it is indeed a prejudice of this sort, springing chiefly, though perhaps not always, from hatred to a positive religion, which lies at the bottom of all the attempts, in these modern times, to divest the religion of the Bible of its supernatural character, and to place it, so far as its origin is concerned, on the same level with the multitudinous human systems of belief. Where this prejudice cannot be supposed to arise from any special hostility to religion generally, we can only conceive of it as growing out of a strong *à priori* persuasion of the improbability or impossibility of a supernatural communication of divine truth to the human mind. And if we ask what can be the ground for such a persuasion, the fair answer must be, that it is that singular notion of freedom on the part of man and necessity in God, the offspring of modern specula-

tion carried to the extreme, which, while it denies the possibility of God's interfering with His own laws, asserts for human reason an absolute independence of outward authority, and a self-sufficiency for the discovery of all truth, by its own unaided powers, to which the history of human errors shows it to be little entitled. The *immanency* of God in His rational creatures is the articulate form in which this persuasion expresses itself.<sup>1</sup> God, it is said, impenetrates His own creation; and, while maintaining a sort of independent personality, lives through all life, and especially through the life of thought. He cannot be conceived to work outwardly and by fitful communications; He can only be conceived to work inwardly, by one uniform law of indwelling energy through all minds.

The religion of the Bible, it is held therefore, is the historical result of this constant, indwelling energy, in the purest form in which it, as yet, has manifested itself. But it is a form vitiated by a false intermixture of the supernatural and miraculous. All this latter adds nothing to the essential truth, but rather stands in the way of its free reception. It makes *that* outward and objective to us, which, as religion, should be most inward and subjective. It makes *that* positive and authoritative, which, as being the highest freedom of the rational soul, should exist only within it as its inmost law. This, so far as we can make it out, is the position maintained by the most subtle and powerful antagonists of a positive revelation at the present day. It is a formidable one — not indeed in itself, but because it addresses itself to the strongest passion of cultivated human nature, the pride of its own self-sufficiency; and because again, being a protest against all outward authority whatsoever, in the province of religion, it seems to take the strongest stand of Protestantism against Romanism. But as an extreme departure from one error generally leads to another which is its opposite, so it has proved in this case. For how can we suppose that to be anything else than an error, and one even more dan-

<sup>1</sup> See the recent work of Schwarz: Zur Geschichte der neuesten Theologie — throughout.



gerous than Romanism itself, which, to maintain itself, must contradict all that we know of the history of the human mind when undoubtedly left to itself, and do violence to that Word, which is admitted to contain the fullest and purest expression of religious truth, by separating that truth from every supernatural element, that is to say, from all the vital connections with historical facts, wherewith it is bound up? To what strange lengths men may be led by their overweening reliance upon some preconceived theory avowedly based upon nothing but their own ideal notions; to what lengths they may be led in arbitrarily modifying and altering, or, in their own language, correcting the best established facts of the past; what extravagant fictions, irreconcilable with the plainest dictates of common sense, more incredible than any miracle in the legends of the saints, they are ready to palm upon others and upon themselves, rather than to take things as they are given and as they only could have occurred, is nowhere more strikingly illustrated than in those bold criticisms upon the sacred narratives—peculiar to the present age—which for no other purpose than to transform the miraculous into the mythical, and thus escape the necessity of admitting a positive divine revelation, would bring down the time of the composition of the gospels to somewhere about the middle of the second century.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> These later writers of the critical school, as it is called, coming after such men as F. Wolf and B. Niebuhr, might remind one of a set of giddy, thoughtless boys, who having witnessed the grand blaze made by the burning up of a heap of rubbish, take some opportunity afterwards to try the same experiment on the next convenient hay-mow or grain-stack. With what indignation Niebuhr regarded this misapplication of his own true method of historical criticism, is well known. "In my opinion," says he in one of his letters from Rome, "he is not a Protestant Christian, who does not receive the historical facts of Christ's earthly life in their literal acceptance, with all their miracles, as equally authentic with any event recorded in history, and whose belief in them is not as firm and tranquil as his belief in the latter; who has not the most absolute faith in the articles of the Apostles' creed, taken in their grammatical sense; who does not consider every doctrine and every precept of the New Testament as undoubted divine revelation, in the sense of the Christians of the first century, who knew nothing of a Theopneustia. Moreover, a Christianity after the fashion of the modern philosophers and pantheists, without a personal God, without immor-

When we find men put to such shifts to make out their point, we may reasonably conclude that they are wrong in their original position. They do but prove the very thing they are aiming to confute, by showing the absurd consequences that must follow by supposing its contrary. We may therefore, as it seems to us, look upon all this terrible array of "searching criticism" as but constituting another link in the chain of evidence which, to those who pay due regard to the moral bearing and tendencies of an argument, places beyond the possibility of rational doubt the fact that God has miraculously and supernaturally interposed, and in His written Word declared to man, directly and authoritatively, those truths which, though relating to His own eternal well-being, he could never have found out by himself.

It being sufficiently evident from these general considerations that a supernatural revelation is, some how or other, contained in the sacred books of Scripture, the next point to be inquired into is: How was this revelation given, and what is the nature of the process by which the divine communication has been safely and without material error brought under the form of human conceptions and of written language for the common benefit of mankind? And here it may be proper to draw clearly the line of distinction between the conceptions *revelation* and *inspiration*.

By revelation, then, we understand all God's direct manifestations of Himself, with their necessary connections and dependencies.<sup>1</sup> Revelation, according to our view of it, is an organic

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tality, without human individuality, without historical faith, is no Christianity at all to me; though it may be a very intellectual, very ingenious philosophy. I have often said, that I do not know what to do with a metaphysical God, and that I will have none but the God of the Bible, who is heart to heart with us."—Niebuhr's Life. Am. ed p 362.

<sup>1</sup> An able and remarkable article on Revelation by Dr. Rothe, in the last number of the Theol. Studien u. Kritiken, came into our hands too late to be made use of; which we regret. He regards the supernatural as belonging necessarily to a revelation in the strict sense, which he defines as consisting of the two elements, divine manifestation and inspiration — manifestation (miraculous) forming its external and objective; inspiration, its internal and subjective, side. What he has to say of the *supernatural*, historical unfolding of revelation within the "organism of *natural* history," is well worthy of attention.

whole, of which a part only may indeed be given at a particular time, but which in each and every one of its parts has regard to all the other parts, and stands in vital connection with them. Revelation is a term which ought by no means to be restricted to that order of truths alone that could not be known by unaided human reason, but embraces the whole circle of truths and of facts, whether knowable or not knowable by unaided reason, which are necessary to make what God communicates clearly intelligible to, and practically operative on, beings constituted as we are, and with all our passions and infirmities. Revelation, therefore, is inextricably connected with history and with the record of human sins and errors, human griefs and joys. Revelation, in the very idea of it, is prophetic and progressive from its beginning; it is a thing of time and therefore of history; and the developments of the one are so entirely calculated upon and adapted to those of the other, as to be incapable of being understood in their true meaning and full significance out of that connection. Finally, revelation was completed by the appearance of our Saviour and by the teachings of the Apostles under the guidance of His Spirit. The actual manifestation of the Word made flesh and dwelling among us, of divine truth visibly and perfectly brought out in our own nature, was the highest ultimate realization of the idea of a revelation from God to man. In Him all that had been revealed before was fulfilled and completed by the union of absolute truth with a human personality. The history of our Saviour's life and death, and the exposition of the significance of that great event in all its bearings in the writings of the New Testament, were therefore the consummation and conclusion of the whole matter. And if the appearance of Christ Himself cannot be satisfactorily explained as having resulted in the natural course of human development; if it is a phenomenon which, whether considered in itself or in its effects, so far transcends all that elsewhere has ever originated or could be supposed to originate out of human nature left to itself, that we must regard it as supernatural, then everything from the beginning that looked forward to,

and had its completion in, this appearance, must be regarded as supernatural also.

The whole must belong to another, altogether higher order of things than any that could possibly be conceived to be developed out of sinful human nature.

Having thus defined revelation, it may be proper to add a remark or two before we proceed to consider inspiration.

First, it seems to us no improvement on the language of the older theologians, whose instinctive sense of the truth doubtless determined their phraseology, to speak of the Bible as *containing* a revelation or certain revelations from God, instead of itself, as an organically connected whole, *constituting* a revelation. What seems to be in the mind of the later writers who are so fond of talking of the Bible as containing revelations, is this, — that by revelation can only be meant certain abstract truths or dogmas, certain absolute ideas, addressed to pure human reason.<sup>1</sup> The Bible, it is supposed, contains such ideas, mixed up with a great deal of other matter, which cannot be ascribed to the dictation or direction of the Holy Spirit. The revelation consists simply of these ideas; all the rest belongs to the side of human finiteness, imperfection, and error. But it seems here to be forgotten that religion and philosophy are two widely different things. The very purpose of religion is to bring the finite and the Infinite together; to bring the finite, ignorant, erring, and sinful creature, man, into the nearest union with the Infinite Creator. A revealed religion must, there-

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<sup>1</sup> Neander, in his *Life of Christ* (p 100), alluding to the fact that our Saviour wrote nothing, remarks: "Had HE, in whom the Divine and the human were combined in unbroken harmony, intended to do this (viz. to transmit his doctrine to all future ages in a form written by himself), he could not but have given to the Church the perfect *contents* of his doctrine in a perfect *form*. Well was it, however, for the course of development which God intended for his kingdom, that what could be done, was not done. The truth of God was not to be presented in a fixed and absolute form, but in manifold and peculiar representations, designed to complete each other, and which bearing the stamp at once of God's inspiration and man's imperfection, were to be developed by the activity of free minds in free and lively appropriation of what God had given by his Spirit."

fore, let itself completely down to the weaknesses and necessities of our actual condition.<sup>1</sup>

But again, spiritual, religious truth is not abstract, ideal truth, but it is the ideal conjoined with the real. It is truth in being and not merely truth in thought and speculation. We cannot well conceive the possibility of a revelation of divine truth in this sense, except in connection with history and with actual facts; except in connection with a series of such facts, wherein the abstract will and purposes of the Divine mind, if we may so express it, with regard to man, are plainly demonstrated and placed beyond all mistake, by a well-authenticated record of His actual dealings with men directly; a record in which the part relating to man, in the whole manifestation of his character as ignorant and depraved, would be quite as important as the part relating to God and His truth; since the one could be clearly shown only in connection and by contrast with the other. But Scripture, being precisely such a record and nothing else, should therefore be looked upon as constituting and not merely containing, a revelation.

By comprehending the whole body of Scripture together, as the record of a special revelation, we no longer feel constrained to look upon the supernatural as the *unnatural*. Miracles belong, as a matter of course, to the order of such a special revelation. They constitute a necessary part of it, and are altogether in their proper place. The continuity and connection of the facts depend on them. Without them, the series of events in such a system of special revelation would be quite unnatural and inexplicable.

No theory of a special revelation can long stand its ground, which seeks in any way or from any motive, however good in itself, to explain away any of the facts belonging to it. There are some who have thought it absolutely necessary, in order to maintain the doctrine of plenary inspiration, to institute the distinction between a literal and a spiritual sense of scriptural language. The literal is that which is

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<sup>1</sup> La gloire de l'Evangile n'est pas seulement d'avoir divinisé la vérité, mais de l'avoir humanisée. — *Vinet, Etudes, sur B. Pascal, p. 216.*

the first to present itself; but there is another lying beneath this, which is the spiritual and true sense. In one way of understanding it, we might accept this principle without hesitation; in that, namely, of the apostle who said: "The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life." As in all other writings, so also in Scripture, which must be subject to the same general rules of interpretation, we are not to be held bound by the letter, but to penetrate to the real sense which it expresses. But the principle of the double sense to which we refer, is quite another thing.<sup>1</sup> According to it, Scripture has really two meanings, one on the face of it, another underneath. In a word, it is throughout a sort of allegory, in which one thing is said, but another signified. By understanding the matter thus, we have a ready way of removing every perplexing difficulty and of reconciling what we find written, with that notion of infallibility, according to which, in the language of a late writer on Inspiration, it was not the inspired penmen themselves who wrote, "further than as to the mere motion of the finger, but God Himself who wrote with their hands." But if the inspired penmen never recorded what they themselves actually saw, heard or felt, but it was God Himself who wrote with their hands, then, since they generally express themselves as if they *were* recording such things; since Luke, for example, professes

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<sup>1</sup> In such a connected whole as revelation, it is not necessary to suppose that each individual sacred writer was conscious of the full meaning of his own language, or even that he was always conscious of its true meaning. The following remarks of Bishop Butler are here in point: "To suppose that the Scriptures and the things contained in them can have no other nor further meaning, than those persons thought they had, who first recited or wrote them, is evidently saying that those persons were the original, proper and sole authors of those books, i. e. that they are not inspired. . . . Till this be determined, it must in all reason be supposed, not indeed that they have, for this is taking for granted that they are inspired, but that they *may* have, some further meaning than what the compilers saw or understood. And, upon this supposition, it is supposable also, that this further meaning may be fulfilled. Now, events corresponding to prophecies, interpreted in a different meaning from that in which the prophets are supposed to have understood them; this affords, in a manner, the same proof that this different sense was originally intended, as it would have afforded, if the prophets had not understood their predictions in the sense it is supposed they did; because there is no presumption of their sense of them being the whole sense of them. — Butler's Works, I. 316.

to give us his perfect understanding of all things from the very first; since the Psalmists write as men giving expression to the trials and struggles of their own inward experience; — nothing remains for it, but that we must put all this down as belonging to the primary and literal sense, while the true sense lies veiled under these expressions of human confidence or human infirmity. But what a singular notion of revelation is this! How mechanical, stiff, and unvital! How entirely divested of all that character which bespeaks our human interest and sympathies; and which does so solely because we feel quite assured that what is said to us comes from the very mind and heart of the writer, expressing just what he means and nothing else. But, happily, no such theory as this is required in order to defend the divine authority of the Bible as an infallible rule of faith against every serious objection. With simpler views of the manner in which God has seen fit to reveal His truth to mankind, we get rid of half the difficulties and objections of unbelief at once. By complicating the matter we but increase the number of questions to be answered and doubts to be resolved.

Considering revelation, then, as one simple and connected system of supernatural divine teaching, by word and fact, of which the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament are the faithful record, let us next inquire what is meant by Inspiration. Inspiration may be shortly defined as that guidance from above, whereby the sacred penmen, in committing this divine revelation to writing, were preserved from all such error as would interfere with the end which God, in giving this revelation to man, proposed.

Two questions here arise: first, as to the end of a *written* revelation; second, as to the means necessary to secure it. With regard to the first point, it is obvious to remark, that the essential conception of a revelation being such as we have represented, it could exist without being committed to writing at all. God revealed himself to Adam, to Noah, and to the patriarchs; but we have no reason to suppose that the revelations then made were preserved down to the time of

Moses, otherwise than by tradition. We know for a certainty that the revelation by Christ was preserved in the church for many years, only by the accounts of eye witnesses and the testimony of the Apostles. It was long before these accounts and this testimony were reduced to the form of written records. During all this period, revelation certainly depended for its integrity upon oral tradition; so that it does not appear to be absolutely necessary to the existence and knowledge of a revelation, that it should stand in the form of written documents. But it is, at the same time, equally evident, that a revelation depending solely upon tradition for its preservation could not long retain its character of infallibility. First, because it could not be referred with certainty to authentic records capable of being verified beyond all reasonable question; secondly, because oral tradition becomes, in process of time, an altogether unsafe mode of transmission. It is plainly necessary, therefore, that a revelation should be committed to writing in order to secure it against all uncertainty as to its origin, and against all danger of being altered and corrupted in its transmission from one place or one age to another. The question now presents itself: What constitutes the authentic and trustworthy report of a revelation? For although a revelation is of necessity infallible when given, being some express manifestation of God in his relation to man, yet so far as it has been exposed to any possibility of mistake in the reporting or the recording of it, its original infallibility can be of no avail to procure and preserve for it that character of absolute authority, with which it was invested at the first. What is necessary to perpetuate the authority of a revelation once given?—since we can conceive of no other purpose of its being committed to writing. The sacred writers themselves answer this question by saying: “All scripture is given by inspiration of God;” “Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” It was not enough that the writers should be good and holy men, upon whose honest intentions and faithful care, in recording what was entrusted to them, all reliance could be placed; they must also be inspired and



moved by an influence from above — even that of the Holy Ghost. So we have it upon the authority of these writers themselves; and there they are content to leave the matter. We are not told precisely in what this influence consisted, nor how far it extended; whether it was an influence which superseded, or which only regulated and guided the natural powers of the soul; whether it was an influence of immediate dictation, or only of general supervision; whether it differed altogether in kind, or only in its special application, from those gifts of inspiration and illumination which characterized the first converts to Christianity; nor are we informed in what way or by what tokens they who were under such influence of the Holy Ghost, as qualified them for this special service, were assured of the fact. We are only given clearly to understand, that “no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation;” in other words, that no written record of a revelation has resulted from any private and subjective interpretation of divine truth, but everything has been presented precisely after that form in which it was designed to be presented by Infinite Wisdom. Thus far, and no further, does Scripture itself go, in declaring its title to our implicit confidence, its claim to be regarded as an infallible record of divine truth. Holy men spake — not however, to utter their own private or subjective opinions; they spake only as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

It is certain, that there are two ways in which this language, taken by itself, might be understood, without any great overstraining; since, in a written revelation, while the truths are divine, the words must be human, this language might be understood as referring mainly or exclusively to the words, which being human and therefore fallible, needed to be directly suggested, in order that the writer, in communicating the divine meaning, might be preserved from all possibility of mistake. Such, perhaps, would be the view of inspiration most likely to be entertained by almost any mind whose interest was chiefly directed to the single point of maintaining the absolute infallibility of the Scriptures. But since evidently there can be no revelation except where

the divine thoughts are transfused into human thought, and, for the time, constitute an integrant part of the human consciousness, when the words by which this consciousness is to be expressed, may be safely left, as in all other cases, to take care of themselves, so it might be supposed without any overstraining of the language, that, when it is said, holy men spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, this occupancy of the entire consciousness by the Holy Spirit, is all that was meant; while the man was left to express the thoughts of which he was thus made conscious, freely in his own words, and according to his own individuality of character. And such, probably, would be the view of inspiration most likely to present itself to minds fully aware of the great difficulties attending the other view of the matter. We find, accordingly, both these views maintained with equal earnestness by the believers in a supernatural revelation, in all ages of the church. And, what is painful to add, we find also, very uniformly, a disposition in the advocates of the extreme views on one side, to misapprehend or to misrepresent those entertained on the other. There are difficulties indeed, on both sides — difficulties which laid hold of and pushed hard by an adroit objector, could be answered by most persons no otherwise than by saying: yes, you make out a strong objection to my doctrine, and I cannot reply to you; only that I believe it notwithstanding. You point out to me certain discrepancies of statement in the Bible which, to be candid, I can neither deny nor explain. Still I hold them to be capable of explanation and that every word is inspired; for how else could Scripture be infallible? Or (on the other side) you accuse me of allowing to the sacred penmen a liberty in their choice of expressions and in their statement of facts, inconsistent with the idea of their infallibility. I do not deny the charge, nor can I fully explain the difficulty. But still I believe in the authority of Scripture as an absolute rule of doctrine and life, and I also believe that the inspired writers expressed their own convictions in their own way and in the full consciousness of their freedom; for there are all the marks of it on every page that I read.

To all, except such as boldly deny the fact of a supernatural revelation, and who explain inspiration as being simply the *genius* for religion, which in Moses and the Hebrew prophets existed in an extraordinary degree and which dwelt in Jesus beyond measure; who see inspiration, therefore, alike in every instance where the sense of the divine has taken powerful hold of the imagination, directing it to teach men obedience to God, instead of science or the admiration of the beautiful<sup>1</sup> — to all, in a word, except the *naturalists* in religion, the doctrine of inspiration, though clear to that faith which sees at a glance the infinite distance between the truth so suited to meet our deepest wants, which Scripture reveals, and all that has ever been found out by man's wisdom alone, must, no doubt, ever have its difficulties, lying as it does, like every other profoundest spiritual truth, quite beyond the grasp of our finite understanding.

We may venture, however, merely to suggest, that if the view above given of what constitutes a revelation be correct, if God's revelation of himself comprehends all the facts, connected with his direct and miraculous interposition in the affairs of the world, investing the least of them with an importance which they could not have in any other connection, inasmuch as, like the smallest epithelial scale on the surface of the human body, they grow out of, and, each in its proper time and place, contribute their humble share to, the great organic whole to which they belong, then the objection which many feel to the plenary inspiration of Scripture, arising out of what seems to them the altogether tem-

<sup>1</sup> See the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* of Spinoza, in which this view of the matter was first clearly set forth. The pantheism and determinism, or rather necessitarianism, which characterize the whole school of the *mere speculative* theologians in Germany, plainly enough point back to the true origin of this school. Says Bouillier: "Si Spinoza est le père des systèmes panthéistes qui un siècle plus tard, ont régné et régnent encore en Allemagne, il est aussi le père de cette exégèse biblique savante et hardie, qui, à la même époque, y a fait de si grand progrès. Le célèbre docteur Paulus, dans la préface de son édition des œuvres de Spinoza, dit que le *Tractatus theologico-politicus* non seulement en avait prédit, mais même déjà démontré la plupart des résultats. — Hist. de la philosophie Cartésienne, Vol. I. p. 398.

porary and insignificant, or it may be, the partial and defective character of many of the statements to be found therein is disposed of at once.

But again, if the view we have taken of revelation be correct; if God reveals himself not only by abstract teachings of his will and of his truth infused into the minds of his chosen instruments in the form of thought, and thought moulded into truest expression; if he has revealed himself no less really, in a miraculous providence, by the leading of his chosen people, and last of all by the actual appearance of the Word made flesh and dwelling among us; if he has revealed himself in these great facts of history, and if the veracious statement of these facts makes up the great body, the bones, flesh, and sinew of his written word, then inspiration must surely consist, to a great extent, in simply that state of mind which constitutes the truthful historian. The facts are the revelation, just as they actually transpired; the inspiration is whatever secured the sufficiently exact report of these facts. We say sufficiently exact; for from the very nature of the case, facts are relative to the observer. No two witnesses can possibly look at them from the same point of view. No two reports, from different sources, can possibly be exactly the same. We cannot demand, in the case of sacred facts, a different kind of exactness from that which belongs to the true report of all historical facts. Variation, to a certain extent, is here the very test of truth. Inspiration, therefore, cannot consist in such a miraculous infusion of light as would lead each historian to report facts differently seen, and differently related by different witnesses, precisely alike. Each can draw up his report only from one point of view, and differences are unavoidable. The truth is what can be made out from the reports on all sides. This is what we who read are left to gather. A degree of uncertainty, therefore, necessarily attaches itself to the truest of historical records, to sacred as well as to profane. We are not called upon to believe blindly, but thoughtfully; ever remembering that the value of the history is to be measured, not so much by the minute accuracy of the details, as by

the end of it all, which, in the Bible, is to reveal God in his relations to man. We hold, then, that the facts of the Bible were reported by men sufficiently enlightened to secure the end intended by those facts. All necessary things, which might otherwise have been forgotten or accidentally omitted, were brought to remembrance by that Holy Spirit which guided them. Of this, in the case of the evangelists, we are assured by Christ's promise to his disciples, and from analogy we may conclude it was the same in every case. It was a supernatural guidance and assistance of the memory with reference to the one great end, the sufficiently exact transmission of all those facts by which God directly revealed himself to mankind.

But we are not to forget that God has revealed himself not only in a sacred history, continuous from Adam to Christ, from the fall to the redemption; but also, within the compass of that history, to prophets and apostles. God spake at sundry times, and in divers manners, by the prophets. Finally, he has spoken to us by his Son, and by those to whom the great Teacher said: "Behold I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high." We cannot here, as in the other case, separate inspiration from revelation. We cannot, with any propriety, say of the things "which were written in the law of Moses, and in the Prophets and in the Psalms, concerning Christ," that such things could be written otherwise than by immediate supernatural communication of the truth to the individual minds of those who wrote. We cannot say of Him who testified concerning himself: "My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me: — I have not spoken of myself, but the Father which sent me, he gave me commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak," that the inspiration and the revelation were not identically one and the same thing. Neither can we say of the Apostle Paul, who affirms of himself: "The gospel which was preached of me is not after man; for I neither received it of man, neither was taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ," that inspira-

tion, in his case, was simply an infallible bringing to remembrance of things he had outwardly witnessed and heard. Nor can it be said of the other Apostles, who had lived with our Lord, and might, therefore, truly affirm: "What we have seen and heard, declare we unto you," that the grand impression left on their minds by our Saviour's life and teaching, and called fresh to their recollection by the Holy Spirit, constituted all the inspiration of which they were the subjects. It is very evident that, in all these cases, inspiration was a direct revelation of the truth in the minds of those who spoke and wrote. This is evident, in the case of the last named Apostles, from the promise expressly given to them: "When He, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth; for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear that shall he speak; and he will show you things to come. He shall glorify me; for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you." And how this was meant, is plain enough from the fact, that it was through the Apostles rather than through their Master, the natural and perfect body of Christian doctrines, so imperfectly understood by them in our Saviour's life-time, has come down to us.

With regard to this inspiration, which is so closely connected with revelation that one cannot be separated from the other, while we admit that, so far as the Spirit's operation is concerned, it remains an altogether transcendent fact, surpassing our power of explanation or of comprehension, yet in another point of view it is not so wholly incomprehensible but that we may know something of its nature by what is manifest in its effects. As our Saviour, who possessed the fulness of the Spirit, and at all times uniformly alike, still exhibits, in all that He does and says, the entire self-possession and self-consciousness of His human individuality; as He who presents the highest possible example of inspiration, presents also, at the same time, the most certain evidence of consciously possessing and using the reason, the understanding and the passions of a man, and in uttering what He received as a commandment from the Father, still uttered it as the man Christ Jesus;—so His disciples

after Him and so all the prophets before Him were sober, self-possessed teachers, each fully conscious of his own personality, each judging, reasoning, feeling and speaking, even in the moment of inspiration, according to his own peculiar habits of thought and mode of expressing himself. The individual was still himself, and wrote out of the fulness of his heart and in the entire consciousness of his freedom; as the apostle Paul avows in his second epistle to the Corinthians: "Out of much affliction and anguish of heart, I wrote unto you with many tears;" and again: "We are not as many which corrupt the Word of God; but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ." Were it possible to express the impulses of personal feeling as well as the entire sense of freedom, more clearly than we find them expressed by this apostle in communicating to the Corinthian church the message which the Holy Spirit was that moment inditing? Which leads us to remark:

Finally, that in these cases of direct revelation or inspiration, the truth was not only tinged, if we may so express it, with the personal peculiarities of the individual organ through whom it came, but was also unavoidably fused with another earthly element, in the historical circumstances, the immediate occasions, whatever they might happen to be, which called it forth. But the divine truth, thus doubly humanized, first by entering into the life of the individual who was its organ, next by coming into contact with the life of the time in which it was delivered, while it lost nothing thereby of its essential purity, gained a practical power, a force of reality, both for the time in which it was announced and for all succeeding times, which it could not have had otherwise. It was the highest eulogium of Socrates that he brought down philosophy from the aerial heights to the business and bosoms of men. But no less can be said of revelation than that it brought down the truth we most deeply need, from the very fountain of all truth, to the comprehension of the poorest and the weakest of our race.