

The Divine Authority of Holy Scripture.

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HOOKER has warned us that "we must . . . take great heed lest in attributing unto Scripture more than it can have, the incredibility of that do cause even those things which indeed it hath most abundantly to be less reverently esteemed."¹ The words of wise counsel were never more urgently needed than at the present time, when men insist on bringing the fullest historic research and scientific criticism to bear upon the great historico-spiritual bases of our faith. For if we are to "guard the deposit"² at all which we hold so precious, we must know how to distinguish between that *depositum fidei* and the mere accessories with which men often come to confound it. There are essentials of faith, to surrender which lightly to the first suitor who demands them, without adequate credentials, would be an act of betrayal of trust as heinous as if in some secular trusteeship we parted as trustees with the securities of our *cestui que trust* to a stranger who only had some mere *prima facie* right to inspect them. But there are non-essentials which are like the wearisome circumlocutions which used to be so dear to legal minds of bygone days—things which we have learnt happily to dispense with, which confirmed nothing which was not already sure, and were not necessary to make the title secure. To stand upon traditions, to keep reaffirming passionately our adhesion to views of Biblical revelation and inspiration which we have not carefully examined and proved, is not only contrary to the true spirit of a living and progressive Protestantism; it is to court defeat, like one who should stake the salvation of his country from invasion upon its martello-towers along the coast; it is to endanger the citadel by dissipating our defence along a line of forts already unmasked by the enemy's fire, instead of concentrating and consolidating

¹ "Ecclesiastical Polity," Book II., c. 8.

² 1 Tim. vi. 20.

our defence at positions which can really be held as impregnable, and which are vital to the citadel itself. We need to make it, above all things, plain just now that the reverence due to the Bible as "the library of revelation" is perfectly reconcilable with the most thoroughgoing investigation of it on its human side and the most scientific analysis of its contents. And, conversely, nothing in that investigation or analysis, when conducted in a reverent spirit, need shake our conviction as to its Divine authority.

What, then, is the authority by which we are led to conclude that the Bible, in a degree different from all other books, and in a way purely its own, contains a revelation from the Most High God? The answer used practically to lie in the assertion of its Divine, at the expense of its human, character. It was Divine—that is, unlike all human books, it was unerring in its scientific accuracy, infallible in its truth—of whatever sort that truth might be—perfect, so that it revealed no process of human growth, no possibility of development from its first page to its last. There are few—even the most conservative—who would take up that extreme position in its entirety to-day. But we do well to remember, with regard to this old line of defence, that it had at least the virtue of thoroughness and consistency; and that those who have abandoned it, without as yet finding a sounder and stronger basis for their faith in the Divine character of Biblical revelation, are in a far less logical, and, therefore, far more dangerous, position than the old supporters of out-and-out verbal inspiration in its boldest form.

The supreme test of the reality of the revelation contained in the Bible does not lie in the infallibility of its dicta upon critical and intellectual issues. It is found in far higher regions of spiritual certainty. It lies in the infallibility of its witness to Christ. It is to be sought in the light which it throws upon the uniqueness of His Person and the confirmation with which it crowns His whole work. An illuminating modern writer has defined Christianity as "the meaning of the fact of Christ."¹

¹ Carnegie Simpson, "The Fact of Christ," p. 172.

That might also stand in the widest sense as the purport of the Bible. It is the unique relation of Holy Scripture to Him, rather than His relation to it, which forms the witness to its truth as revelation. It is through that relationship that we come to perceive that His relationship to it as Author is a special one. "Alone, absolutely alone, amongst leaders of the soul, Jesus absorbs the highest principles into His own personality."¹ Alone, absolutely alone, among the collections of books in the world, the Bible bears a continuous witness to Him as foretold, prepared for, discerned, interpreted, and brought home to the desiring hearts of men.

We are able, therefore, to affirm that there is a Divine revelation contained in the Bible, and that this revelation is common both to Old and New Testaments. The Most High God has actually spoken (*πολυμερῶς καὶ πολυτρόπως*). He has made Himself known in a continuous revelation, of which the Incarnation is the climax and crown. He has unfolded to men, "as they were able to hear it," the true knowledge of His Being, the true knowledge of themselves, the true knowledge of what He has become and will become to them and in them, and of what they may become in Him and unto Him. It is necessary to be very clear, because, as Professor Orr has pointed out,² even when we hear the word "revelation" used we are not quite safe to-day as to its real meaning. It is not enough, as he affirms, to speak, as Andrew Lang does, of Israel's "eminent genius for religion"; or, with Duhm, of a "providential guidance in Israel," in the stages of the development of religion; or, with Gunkel, of Israel as "the people of revelation." For all such statements fall far short of the uniqueness and supremacy of the revelation of Jesus Christ which we actually find in the Jewish Scriptures. By "revelation" we mean far more than a "natural development of religion"; we mean what cannot be otherwise classified than as a supernatural development. We mean, indeed, "providential guidance" in

¹ Carnegie Simpson, "The Fact of Christ," p. 6.

² "Problem of the Old Testament," p. 21.

matters of religion, but we mean providential guidance in which one great Final Cause is ever present, "one far-off Divine event," towards which from the very first we are travelling, giving unity and purpose to the whole. We mean, indeed, an "eminent genius for religion," but a genius which implies not so much pathetic yearnings after God as express directions received from God. We mean, not desires, but fulfilments; not

"lame hands of faith,
Upon the great world's altar-stairs
That slope thro' darkness up to God,"

but that vision to faith, that reward to faith, that message to faith which enabled "holy men of God to speak as they were moved by the Holy Ghost," and led St. John to write: "We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we know Him that is true, and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son, Jesus Christ."¹ Within the compass of these sacred books is contained a unique, authoritative, final message from the Living God to the heart and intelligence and conscience of mankind. "Beginning from Moses and from all the prophets, He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself."² The Highest Authority has thus affirmed the unity of all Scripture in its progressive revelation of Himself. He has affirmed more, we think, in saying this; He has affirmed at least its *general* historicity. The revelation is not contained in myth or legend; it is not derivable from sources common to itself with purely human religions. There is an actual Divine element in it, and it is, in fact, due to that very Divine element, that it is so distinctively and universally human.

That intense humanity is one, at least, of the proofs of its character as revelation. The defender of the Bible as a library of revelation, bearing clear marks of inspiration, does not thereby deny human co-operation and human influence of a genuine kind. There are diversity, progress, influence of

¹ 1 John v. 20, R.V.

² Luke xxiv. 27, R.V.

environment, direct and indirect, constant adaptation, local and temporal colouring, individuality of authorship and standpoint, partiality of knowledge about many things. "The strictest upholder of Inspiration," writes Professor Orr,¹ "will hardly place the Books of Chronicles on the same level with the Gospel of St. John." Indeed, a careful and reverent student of the Bible has written: "The very object of a large portion of the Bible seems to be not so much the disclosure of truth as the embodiment of truth already disclosed."² There is an inspiration of selection rather than an inspiration of creation. Purely human sources are often used. "Inspiration," writes Professor Orr, "does not create the materials of its record; it works upon them." The revelation is progressive "by divers portions and in divers manners." "Revelation proceeds³ by way of development, by a gradual opening of the eyes to higher ranges of truth." The "highest summits of all" are not in Genesis or Exodus, or the Books of Kings, but in Isaiah or Jeremiah, in the doctrine of the Suffering Servant or the prophecy of the New Covenant. Even the prophets had no grant of omniscience or infallibility.⁴

Yet the *witness* borne is infallible. Take away the Divine out of Holy Scripture and the human would fall to pieces. "In Him all things hold together"⁵ is pre-eminently true of the Bible. The unity, the correspondence, the moral consistency, the ever-expanding body of truth, the (still unshaken) supernatural element in the Old Testament as well as the New, the foreshadowing and foretelling of the Christ, the marvellous preparation of the Chosen People to be His witness, the awakening and sustaining of spiritual ideals and longings, which find their only fulfilment in Himself:—all these are unanswerable proofs of revelation.

If this, then, is the substance of revelation, what is the

¹ "Problem of the Old Testament," p. 49.

² Dr. Green, "The Bible Handbook," p. 139.

³ Dr. Sanday, "Inspiration," Bampton Lectures, 1893.

⁴ Girdlestone, "Grammar of Prophecy."

⁵ Col. i. 17, R.V. marg.

connection between revelation and inspiration? A Cambridge thinker, to whose lucid thought and writings the Church owes a memorable debt, Frederick Watson, who passed away on New Year's Day, 1906, has clearly distinguished between the two. He is speaking of the Bible¹ as "the supreme manifestation of Divine Inspiration embodied in human words," and he defines inspiration broadly as "that Divine gift by which all things have their beginning, and also attain their end." Then he goes on (p. 20) to distinguish between inspiration and revelation: "Inspiration is the Divine power within Man which enables him first to appreciate the Divine manifestation, and afterwards to place it on permanent record. Revelation is the removal of the veil which hides Divine things from man's eyes; it is God's manifestation of Himself to man." "The Bible," he adds, "is at once the work of Inspiration and the written record of Revelation. It is a product of one and a chronicle of the other." This corresponds with Westcott's definition, which he goes on to quote: "Inspiration may be regarded in one aspect as the correlative of Revelation. . . . By Inspiration we conceive that (man's) natural powers are quickened so that he contemplates with a Divine intuition the truth as it exists still among the ruins of the moral and physical worlds. By Revelation we see as it were the dark veil removed from the face of things, so that the true springs and issues of life stand disclosed in their eternal nature." Thus, "the one works within man and the other beside him; the one gives him the power of spiritual sight, and the other provides spiritual objects for his spiritual vision. . . . In the light of Inspiration we see the light of Revelation." In the one case God is unveiling to sight; in the other He is opening the eyes to see.²

The Bible, then, contains the actual revelation of God. It was through the inspiration which the writers of both Testaments received that they were able to reveal God. How can we recognize the marks of that inspiration so as to be sure that they were God-directed? The answer would be almost a

¹ Watson, "Inspiration," p. 17,

² *Ibid.*, pp. 20, 21.

recapitulation of the evidences for the truth of Christianity as a Divine revelation. But there are certain features of inspiration which are easily recognized. The first of these is its inspiration of *witness*. It bears the clearest testimony to the fact of Christ. He, the Living Word, not the written word, is the Revelation of the Father,¹ God's first and last message to men. And it is in Holy Scripture that His self-revelation is prepared for, foretold, recorded, and recapitulated in its abiding results and lessons. He is "the very act and the very fact and the very truth of humanity itself,"² and He is at the same time the very image and the very essence and the very Being of God. And the witness of the Bible to this great Revelation is continuous and clear. It takes many forms. It is both direct and indirect. But throughout there is the clearest recognition of "the Lord's Christ." It is an inspiration both of witness and also of *discernment*. That discernment springs from a realization of the Divine Immanence which differentiates the Old Testament prophets and writers from all other wise teachers of men. They "see God everywhere." It is because they have a spiritual gift which brings them into close touch with the unseen.

But with this is another equally noteworthy feature. Through the true vision of God comes the humbling knowledge of self. "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth Thee, wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes."³ There is an inspiration of *conviction* here which stands alone. The sense of sin is direct and personal. It is the sin of Israel herself—not, save indirectly, the sin of other nations—which is dwelt upon. The true spiritual sense of sin is absent from other nations. The desire always with them is to appease the Deity, not to renounce and conquer the sin.

Again, side by side with this is a wholly different characteristic—the marvellous harmony of the Bible. There is in it an inspiration of *self-correspondence*. The Bible is like historic Sion: "A city that is at unity with itself." Though not all of

¹ John xiv. 9.

² Du Bose, "The Gospel in the Gospels," p. 260.

³ Job xlii. 5, 6.

one age or style or workmanship, the hoar and sacred monument of ages of varied needs, of clashing thoughts, of conflicting ideals, yet still, through all these changes, it is one—behind the ramparts of an historic unity never imperilled or lost. “The Old Testament embodies a progressive revelation.”¹ The ideas of God, of His requirements, of His kingdom, of man’s privilege and duty, widen out; but the New Testament is the fulfilment of the Old. It is unintelligible without it. There is living progress. General Gordon once wrote that the difference between the Bible and other books is that “it *is* alive and *makes* alive.”

There is also what Liddon described as “an inspiration of *selection*” in the choice of the facts recorded. They fit into one vast scheme which culminates with the Incarnation of Christ. Specially is this so with the New Testament. Its books were not written at any one time, nor do they bear any one character. They were preceded, in the case of the Gospels at least, by several oral Gospels. Yet we have this marvellous result: At the close of the Apostolic period we find working together the special needs which call forth each distinct letter or writing, the utter unconsciousness of the writers, the absence of any design or common purpose, a complete diversity of standpoint (*e.g.*, St. Paul and St. James), the recognition still of the Old Testament as a complete Bible, the directness with which each letter appears to be directed to special wants, yet the marvel of a New Testament unique in its claim to inspiration, harmonious and self-correspondent, speaking with unity and authority through all ages, and, throughout, bearing clearest witness to Jesus Christ.

There is also, in the most direct way, an inspiration of *morality*. This is far more exceptional and wonderful than it appears at first sight. From other religions morality is divorced. It is never so here. The ethical intensity of the Bible appears not as a subordinate and secondary, but as a supreme and ever-present feature. It completely dominates the Biblical treatment of lives and characters; it forms the background to the whole

¹ Watson, “Inspiration,” p. 75.

plot. Speaking of Ahab's treatment of Naboth the Jezreelite, a leading preacher of to-day says: "It is on this—this great injustice, this great moral failure—that the eyes of the sacred historian are centred. This for him is the crucial interest of Ahab's life, 'The rest of the acts of Ahab and all that he did'; let those read who will."¹ And with this inspiration of morality is that inspiration of *abidingness* which is largely due to it. Eighteen centuries separate the scene of Israel's sin in the Wilderness from the Corinthian life to which St. Paul applies it as a warning.² Nineteen more centuries separate those Corinthians from ourselves. Yet, as we listen year by year to the same warning,³ the same challenge across thirty-seven centuries comes ever with the same living reality.

One might mention with equal force other features of inspiration in the Bible which are equally convincing, though they require more detailed examination and illustration than can be given here in order to bring home that force. Such is its inspiration of *prophecy*. Without at all limiting the word "prophecy" to prediction merely, and whether we regard it from the point of view of its insight or its foresight, it is, in the case of the Bible, equally remarkable. The living insight as to the deepest instincts and needs of man's nature, or as to the trend of national and personal life, its dangers and how they may be averted, its hopes and how they may be realized, is marvellous. So great is that insight, that some have even imagined the gift of foresight which it reveals to be due to the insight, though such a view does not account for all the facts. "In the pagan world," writes Dr. Watson, quoting Mozley, "prophecy founded nothing—it erected no institutions, no framework, no body, no church; it passed away and wandered into space." It "never grew into a practical and directing power." On the other hand, as soon as prophecy found a receptacle in the chosen race, it grew strong, it became an architect and builder, it raised institutions, it enacted ordinances.⁴

¹ Gamble, "Things that Matter," p. 5.

² 1 Cor. x. 6-13.

³ Epistle, Ninth Sunday after Trinity.

⁴ Watson, "Inspiration," p. 135.

It proved itself an instrument of real directing power; it was so living that it made a dying nation live; it was so true that it shadowed forth its own fulfilment; it was so human that it still enshrines the highest hopes of the whole world; it was so Divine that it saw "God manifest in the flesh" afar off. So, in the same way, one might dwell upon that inspiration of *sobriety* and *accuracy* which is such a marked feature of both Testaments. The same providential instinct which made the Early Fathers so careful to discriminate between Apostolic writings and their own marks the whole compilation of the sacred records. In spite of modern critics, to an ordinary reader 1 Kings xviii. bears such a stamp of sobriety and reality that it is simply impossible to accept it as non-historical. What Papias says of St. Mark might be said of each writer: "He wrote accurately all (that Peter mentioned). He made no error, for he took heed to one thing: to omit nothing of what he had heard, and to state nothing falsely in his record." From what source did that sobriety come?



A Good Sermon, But—

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IT may possibly occur to my readers that, in presenting such a subject as preaching, I am appointing myself to a professor's chair and sitting in judgment on my brethren. I may assure them that that chair is quite vacant as far as I am concerned, and that the only parson I am venturing to sit in judgment on is myself.

Now, the phrase "a good sermon," is a very elastic one indeed, and may require a comment or two, because it is so elastic. "One man's meat is another man's poison," and a "good sermon" to one man may be a shockingly bad one to another. Tastes and standards vary. Besides, *moods* count for a good