

THE INSPIRATION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE.

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THE peculiar value of Evangelicalism lies in the emphasis which it places on spiritual religion. Whatever variation there may be with regard to some matters, the essential feature of our Evangelical School of thought lies there. We stress the Atonement, we preach the redemptive power of the crucified and risen Saviour, we hold forth the promise of His abiding Presence and the power of the Holy Spirit, for these are the things which are needful for mankind, and these are the things which we believe God has given us to proclaim.

But the revelation of these truths is contained in the Bible, and the interpretation of the Bible has undergone some startling changes during the last couple of generations, so that the expression of these Evangelical truths is not quite the same as it was in the days of our fathers. The reality of the truths remains for those who call themselves Evangelicals, but the expression of them is found to vary, and the variation is the resultant of differing views of the way in which God has revealed Himself to mankind.

This fact is a hopeful one from which to start, because it makes clear that in the great Evangelical movement there is still the recognition of the vital truths for which our fathers stood. In spite of the much greater variety of opinion among us our primary emphasis still rests upon the great truth that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself and calling men to be born again into a new life of fellowship with Him.

Had Evangelicals as a body looked more to the great positive truths they hold in common we should have been spared much of the anguish of the last few years, for the matters which tend to divide us are as nothing in comparison with the great truths which should hold us together.

This may seem to be prejudging the particular topic with which I am asked to deal, but all events it represents the point of view of those who, like myself, have links with all shades of Evangelical opinion.

The Evangelical school of thought seems to have become divided into three groups, so far as Biblical interpretation is concerned. The first group comprises those whose view would be summed up in the dictum that the Bible is literally the Word of God. Definitions are usually provocative of misunderstanding, and the phrase "the Bible is the Word of God," is no exception to the rule. But what is usually implied by those who use the expression is that they are in opposition to those who declare that the Bible "contains the Word of God," and by contrast they affirm that the Bible is the Word of God from Genesis to Revelation. Along with such a view, and explaining it, is usually a belief in a verbal inspiration of what some

might call a very extreme type, and yet the view seems logical if one accepts the premises of those who look at the Bible in this light. For the argument is stated somewhat as follows, i.e., Man is a moral being with spiritual hopes and longings. These spiritual hopes and longings are not self-created but God-implanted. Now God would not implant these spiritual longings unless He made provision to satisfy them, and the record of His provision to satisfy the spiritual needs of man is contained in the Bible. But God, because He is God, would ensure that the record of His provision would be accurate in detail, and because the Bible does contain the record of God's manifestation of Himself and of His plan for the redemption of man, therefore the Bible must be accurate. It must therefore be believed in implicitly in general detail, otherwise it is a dishonouring of God. Such a view implies as a rule a literal reading of such things as the six days Creation, a literal Garden of Eden, a universal Flood, a literal Tower of Babel, and the like. It sees no element of figurativeness in the book of Jonah, for example, but the whole Bible from the first word to the last becomes literally the Word of God.

Allied with this first group are those who accept the premises referred to above, with reference to the need that God should make some provision to satisfy man's spiritual longings—premises which all Christian men in fact will accept—but who at the same time are conscious of the necessity to define more closely the way in which the record of God's provision for man in the Bible is put together. Hence follows the attempt to define the meaning of Inspiration, and the definition is naturally coloured by the view already held of the Bible as a whole. If the Bible is literally the Word of God, then how can writers who obviously possessed supernatural knowledge in writing some sentences drop to a lower level in writing other sentences? If there are errors as to matters of fact which we can verify, how can we know that there are no errors as to the Godhead or the Future Life, which we cannot verify?—such are some of the questions put by those who hold these particular views, and the practical result is a literal belief in the verbal accuracy of the Bible from the first verse of Genesis to the last verse of Revelation. The view does sometimes take cognizance of the need for textual criticism in order to get back as near as possible to original texts, and it does in some degree allow for the inspiration of selection, as in St. Luke i. 1-4, or St. John xx. 30, 31. It may recognize the composite character of a book like Genesis, whilst there may sometimes be a recognition of the progressive nature of the Biblical revelation. But broadly speaking, the Bible is in this view not merely *sui generis*, but because it is *sui generis* it must be judged from a wholly different standard from every other book. The Bible becomes a complete whole in the sense that to doubt or criticize any part tends to reflect upon God's handiwork.

This summary may easily be criticized as imperfect by those who have been called in recent years conservative Evangelicals, for any writer who attempts to summarize the views of a large body of men,

many of whose views are in some small degree divergent, will always find himself in a position easy to be criticized. What has been mentioned above, however, will be found to be substantially true.

The second group of Evangelicals approaches the Bible in very much the same way as the first. They, like all men, feel the need for some answer to the spiritual longings and desires which they are sure are implanted by God, they are equally desirous of finding out what is the God-given plan for the *rapprochement* of sin-conscious man with a holy God, and they too find their answer in the God-given record of a people and of a Person. But to this group, the God-given record of the race by whom His ways were made known, was conveyed to men in the way in which all God's work has been done in this world, and that is by human agency. Whatever method God may employ in other worlds, in this world He has employed, and He does employ, just ordinary mortals like ourselves. The history of the people of Israel, therefore, makes this group of Evangelicals feel that in using them God was employing a nation who were as other nations, except in the one important point of God's revelation of His holiness and purity and of His promise of Redemption. They see the ordinary secular history of the Israelites running its way, from one point of view, just like the history of any other nation. They read the Genesis record of the beginnings of the world, and they are not perturbed to be told that the record is mythological or that it may possibly not coincide with the findings of science, for they know that the Israelitish statement is immeasurably purer than its supposed Babylonish origin. They read the statement of the million of armed men who came from Egypt, and they see in the large number the stereotyped exaggeration which they can find amongst the early records of other nations. They contemplate the slaughter of the Canaanites by the invading Israelites as they would the similar massacres by the Assyrians. In the idealization of such monarchs as David and Solomon they see repeated the idealization which our own forefathers gave to such kings as Alfred and Edgar, an idealization based upon a solid substratum of fact, but an idealization largely coloured by the contrast such kingships presented to the more decadent days of the succeeding ages. For the same reason they see in the books of Chronicles, for instance, only partial views of such men as David and Solomon.

So again with the views of the Israelites about God. This group sees given to Israel the revelation of "the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in goodness and truth" (Ex. xxxiv. 6). They see this revelation, already foreshadowed in the revelations to Abraham, growing into the life of Israel, much in the same way that the first group does. But this second group would seem to emphasize, more than the first, the development of ideas about God. They are not unmindful of the great passages in such places as Amos ix. 7 or Jonah iv. 11 or Micah vi. 8, but they see that it is only slowly that the Israelites moved from the restricted and almost tribal view of God to the nobler conception given by Hosea and Amos; they find what they believe to be crude ideas of God's

dealings, such as that which attributes Uzzah's death to the latter's perfectly natural and commendable action in trying to save the ark of God from falling (2 Sam. vi. 7). In short, this second group has the same idea of God's revelation of Himself at the beginning, but they see this revelation slowly working its way into the life and conscience of the people, obscured very often by the narrow outlook of the Israelites, contaminated and weakened repeatedly by contact with idolatrous neighbours, but slowly gaining in strength and purity in the days of the prophets, until its fuller and completed revelation in our Lord.

The views of these two groups of Evangelicals about the Old Testament, therefore, do not seem to have any vital difference between them. Both see a clear revelation of God given to Abraham and his descendants, and both see the rise and fall of the purity of that revelation in the subsequent history of the Israelites as given in the Old Testament. Where the second group differs from the first is in the greater latitude allowed to the human element both in the working out of the revelation, as well as in the record of that working out.

In addition to the two groups already referred to, there is another section of Evangelicals whose views are those of what is usually called the "higher critical" school. Their number is small in comparison with those of the first two groups, but to say that there are Evangelicals who hold the "higher critical" views is simply to state a fact. These Evangelicals see two versions of the history of Israel formed and completed by the eighth century B.C., and these versions are combined in the next century to become the "prophetic document" known as J.E. Later in the seventh century part of the Book of Deuteronomy is supposed to be issued, and taken as the basis for the reforms of Josiah, and this Deuteronomic code is supposed to have caused a further revision of the earlier history of the Israelites. Then in the sixth century B.C. the Priestly Code is put forth and enlarged later by the addition of the Law of Holiness, and this becomes the basis for a new version of the early history written from the point of view of the priests. Later still all the documents are combined into the Pentateuch and put forth as such in the days of Nehemiah. Along with such views of the early history of the Israelites there are to be found many of the characteristics noticed as belonging to the second group of Evangelicals, and the main difference between them seems to be that the second do not see their way to accept a view of the history of the Israelites which runs counter to the whole traditions of the Jews. With this important exception the views of the second and third groups are alike in most other respects.

Such in outline is the position of the Evangelical school of thought with regard to the Old Testament. There may be many whose views are only approximately those of one or other of those of the three groups indicated, but in broad outline the varying opinions will be found to run right throughout those who call themselves Evangelical members of the Church of England.

Little need be said about the New Testament, for two reasons. In the first place, whatever differences may have manifested themselves amongst us, there has not been very much variety of view with regard to the authenticity and accuracy of the books of the New Testament. In the second place the position of the New Testament is becoming more assured as criticism is identifying the New Testament more and more with traditional views.

The whole matter, however, is further complicated by the existence amongst us of two differing points of view with regard to the dual Personality of our Lord. On the one hand are those who stress the Divinity of our Lord, and who emphasize it in such a way that to the others it seems to obscure His Humanity. On the other side are those who emphasize both the Divinity and the Humanity of our Lord, but in such a way that to the former group of Evangelicals it seems that the Divinity is in danger of being lost in the Humanity. The practical result so far as Biblical interpretation is concerned is as follows. Those who hold the first point of view would say that our Lord referred to the Old Testament, and that His references therefore placed the seal of authenticity not merely upon historical personages such as Abraham and Moses, and not merely upon the accuracy of the history of Israel as recorded in the Old Testament. They would assert that the books of the Old Testament referred to by Christ have thus the seal of authenticity placed upon them, and that no error of any kind can be admitted about them. They would insist that the book of Jonah, for example, is actual history, and that every quotation from the Old Testament is a quotation of fact, and not simply an illustration, allegorical, spiritual, or otherwise. The point of view is that the Divine Christ in all His references was incapable of error, and the Old Testament, therefore, as a whole is sealed with literal truth and accuracy, because Christ's many references place the imprimatur of Divine authority upon it.

The other section of Evangelicals would not admit this. They would argue that Christ was true man, and that as true man there were limits to His knowledge. His utterances about God and about Himself were absolutely true, but the illustrations He used to convey those truths were couched in the ordinary language of the time, and also from the standpoint of the age in which He was living. If He referred to Jonah, for example, He did not *ipso facto* change what is a prophetic parable into actual history, for it was the spiritual or religious significance with which He was concerned, not the historical. If, again, He quoted Deuteronomy at the Temptation and at other times, this did not shut down all argument as to whether that particular book was a composition of the later period of the Monarchy or of the Mosaic period.

Such is the position in which we find ourselves to-day. It is a position we share with every other section of the Christian Church, but it causes us greater difficulties owing to the emphasis we place upon the importance of the Bible. Our brethren, however, are asking for guidance, and the concluding section of this paper must concern itself with some attempts to give that guidance. In doing so, I

would mention that what I venture to suggest is based upon an examination of the attitude of the sixteenth-century Reformers to the Bible, men whose attitude has its warnings as well as its encouragements for us to-day.

The first thing I would put forward is that we should let THEORIES of Inspiration go by the board. The danger amongst us to-day seems to arise from the fact that Evangelicals who feel on the defensive against new ideas are inclined to fall into the error into which the second generation of Reformers fell. They are attempting too much in the way of definitions of Biblical interpretation, and they are trying to define too closely their particular views on the Inspiration of the Bible. It is from the pursuance of this policy that the present division in our ranks mainly arises, and if we are to profit by the lessons of the past we must beware of the policy of always defining, and then expecting adherence to our definition. What I would urge is, that if a man is convinced of the authority of Holy Scripture he NEED HAVE NO PARTICULAR THEORY OF INSPIRATION AT ALL. All that is required is that we accept the Bible as the supreme authority for faith and morals. No Evangelical should be asked for more, and as an Evangelical he would not offer less; but when this is guaranteed then we can afford to leave THEORIES of Inspiration on one side.

In the second place we should look to the Bible not necessarily for complete LITERAL accuracy, but for SUBSTANTIAL accuracy, the accuracy, that is, which guarantees that a right and correct impression will be given to those who read the Biblical record. The Reformers felt that the Bible would give a faithful description, not necessarily of history or of science, but a faithful record of the way in which God's revelation of His purposes has been made known to men. This is the point to which Evangelicals should address themselves, and if it is kept in mind it will be seen that some variation of interpretation is inevitable. The man who reads the Bible with a full knowledge of the evolution of races is bound to interpret details differently to the man who has not this knowledge. The man who reads it with some knowledge of textual criticism derived from other studies, is bound to interpret it in a way that other men, not so equipped, cannot. This is not necessarily a plea in favour of one point of view more than another, it is merely a recognition of the fact that the interpretation of the skeleton of the Bible is bound to differ according to the mental equipment of the reader. Therefore how far the views of the three groups referred to with regard to Biblical Interpretation are to be regarded as typical of Evangelicals, is quite beside the point. It may be open to discussion to what extent any of these views discountenanced the "substantial accuracy" of the Biblical record, but if the exponents of these respective views can demonstrate that their views do uphold the "substantial accuracy" of the Bible, then they can undoubtedly claim to be heirs of the Reformation and of Evangelical principles. And this is a matter for argument and for argument only; it will not be settled either way by *ipse dixit*.

From this it follows that we may expect much variety of interpretation of the Bible ; but such variety is inseparable from the position taken up by Evangelicals. Our acceptance of Articles XX and XXI implies the recognition of the guidance and moral authority of Church Councils ; and Evangelicals will not overlook that. But Article VI throws the onus upon the God-enlightened and God-guided individual. It is the position taken up by the early Reformers, and in consequence there is bound to be variety of view to-day just as much as there was at the Reformation. For example, we are not much perturbed to-day if some amongst us still insist on Bishop Usher's chronology as against the views of those who see the age of the world and of man lost in hundreds of thousands of years. Nor do we feel a vital difference if some Evangelicals insist on the total depravity of mankind and others do not, as in the eighteenth century. Nor again do we feel a fundamental point of variance if one man, following Calvin, should stress the sovereignty or transcendence of God, whilst another of perhaps more mystical turn of mind stresses His immanence. We might feel the need for a due sense of proportion, but no more than that. As practical men to whom God has given differing gifts, and whom God has endowed with a personality which in no two men is exactly alike, let us expect variety, and don't let us be afraid of it, or be suspicious of it.

With regard to the vexed question of the dual character of the Personality of our Lord there is little likelihood of getting absolute unanimity of opinion. What has puzzled the Christian Church at all times is not outside the realm of possible solution, but that it has puzzled Christians for all times is at least a plea for patience and forbearance. For there is one important fact which I wish to state unhesitatingly, viz., that among Evangelicals there is a uniform loyalty to Christ as Lord and God. Those who hold views about our Lord which may seem very strange to those who adhere to the more traditional views, do not hold those views with the idea of minimizing the Godhead of Christ in the least degree. If they are striving to interpret for themselves the "true humanity" of our Lord, they acclaim and acknowledge unreservedly His "essential Deity."

What I think we all need is the constant positive note about our Lord, and what He is able to do for fallen and struggling humanity. Pascal tells us that "all the seeming contradictions of Scripture are reconciled in Jesus Christ," and it may be that all the seeming differences amongst Evangelicals will be reconciled in the preaching of Jesus Christ and in what He did for our salvation. Those who have any acquaintance with the history of the Reformation will know that the central point of that movement was to direct men to "the Gospel of God, concerning His Son, incarnate, suffering, risen, and glorified through the Spirit, the Sanctifier," to use Luther's phrase. The Reformers had their great varieties of Biblical interpretation, and they had their differences about doctrinal matters, but through all their differences the central truth of Christ as the Saviour of men was never obscured. And it was not obscured

because differences of Biblical interpretation and differences on doctrinal matters never obscured it. The hope for Evangelicals lies there.

In conclusion I would refer to a phenomenon which points the moral to what I have tried to put before you. During the last few months there have appeared volumes in which the subject of Biblical interpretation has been referred to by the Rt. Rev. Bishop Knox, the Rev. Canon Storr, and the Rev. G. T. Manley. No one will dare to deny the name of Evangelical to any of these three, for those who know them recognize in all of them the spirit which animates Evangelicals in the Church of England. With this fact in mind I want you thoughtfully and prayerfully to read the following pages in the books with which their names are associated, i.e., *On What Authority*, pp. 123-126, 133-144; *Liberal Evangelicalism*, pp. 80-100; and *Evangelicalism*, pp. 121-155. As you read you will probably find much with which you agree in all of them, and something also with which you may disagree. But the writers are each of them Evangelicals, and there is a unity amongst them as Evangelicals. Surely the essential thing is that their unity is not IN SPITE of their different points of view, but rather because their differing points of view about the subject of Biblical interpretation are not fundamental to their Evangelical belief. In that fact lies the optimism of those of us who are still seeking for unity amongst Evangelicals.

Messrs. Thomson & Cowan, Glasgow, send us *A Quest for Souls* (6s.). Dr. Geo. W. Druett, the Author, is an American Baptist minister who is one of the best known preachers in the United States. His sermons are popular and rhetorical, but are full of insight and knowledge of the human heart and its needs. Somehow as we read them we were reminded of the style of Spurgeon, and although the outlook is that of the twentieth century, the Evangelistic note is reminiscent in many ways of the great London preacher. He is frequently strikingly epigrammatic, and has a breezy optimism that is infectious.

The Layman's Church.—Bishop Knox has reprinted, through the Church Book Room, his speech at the Albert Hall meeting on Tuesday, March 31st last. The Bishop has entitled the speech *The Layman's Church*, and we trust it will receive a very wide circulation. Nearly 3,000 copies have already been sold or distributed in connection with the recent elections to the House of Laity, together with the Bishop's companion pamphlet, *Misuse of Prayer Book Revision*. The price is 2d. in each case.

