

that their spiritual nature may be temporarily manifested under various material conditions and forms. If the true philosophy of these representations be inquired for,—that would lead into wider questions, which have no special bearing on the passage before us. But there is nothing unreasonable in the Biblical representations, when they are reasonably interpreted. If ministering angels there be at all, we can have no difficulty in believing, that wherever God is wielding the sceptre of his Providence, there they are around his throne, fulfilling, in their own peculiar though subordinate sphere, his high behests.

J. MORISON.

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*THE HUMAN ELEMENT IN THE GOSPELS.*

GIVEN a God, a personal God — something more than a cold block of marble, or the colder abstraction of a philosopher's brain—One who knows, and rules, and loves: given also Man, with his little life of mystery vanishing at either end in greater mysteries still—let him, endowed with reason, passion, affection, have to sound his dim and perilous way down the stream of freewill to an unknown sea, and we possess the known quantities of an equation whose unknown quantity will be *revelation*, such a revelation as we find in the Bible.

But any revelation of God to man must necessarily have to contend with two grave difficulties: first, in regard to the subject-matter of revelation; and, second, in regard to the imperfect media of communication. We may reasonably assume that God would not disclose what we by searching might

find out for ourselves. The plane of revelation comes down and intersects the planes of reason and of sense, but, for the most part, it lies above and beyond these. It has to do with the unknown, the unseen—the spiritual rather than the material. From the very first, it makes demands upon our faith; opening up new worlds of thought—paths that Sense knoweth not, and the vulture-eye of Reason hath not seen. And, then, there is the second difficulty, that of compressing these truths, so varied and so vast, into common finite speech; the difficulty of making God's great thoughts run on the narrow gauge of human language. When Paul was carried to "the third heavens," he heard things which it was not lawful—or, "not possible,"—to utter. With all his familiarity with Greek and Hebrew poetry, and with the Eastern license for hyperbole, he confesses that language fails him, that in all the storehouse of human speech there is no robe ample enough to clothe the vision he has seen. Let science make a discovery, and this difficulty meets her at once. She brings forth some new fact, and lo! she has no swaddling-clothes in which to enwrap it, and so she sets to work to weave them. Our works of science are so full of technicalities, and of words newly-coined, just because science cannot well put her new wine into the old well-worn bottles of common speech. And, by the way, will not this explain to us many of the apparent divergences and discrepancies of Scripture—this inadequacy of expression? God does not give us the whole truth at once; He gives it in fragmentary portions (Heb. i. 4)—a half-truth here and a half-

truth there. Read by themselves, they may appear antagonistic and even contradictory; but put them together, and each is the complement to the other, and they form a beautiful and rounded whole. Truth lies, not in straight lines, but in spheres; and if, taking Infinite Mercy as our starting point, we sail far enough, we shall reach that other pole—Infinite Justice. Both lie on the same meridian—antipodal truths, if we might call them so, their apparent contradiction being in fact a real harmony.

But before we pass to the Gospels and the human element we find there, let us look at the other element common to all Scripture, *the divine*. To what extent does this appear, or, in other words, what is the measure of inspiration in these Sacred Records? Our word "inspiration" occurs but twice in the two Testaments, and in one of these cases (Job xxxii. 8) there is no reference to the Scriptures. Its primary meaning is that Divine influence, or *Divine breathing* upon a man, which enables him to do what by his natural and unaided powers would not be possible. And so that cunning work of the old Tabernacle—the knops and bowls and pomegranates, was as really the product of an inspiration as these canonical books of our Bible; for, says the Lord, concerning Bezaleel, "I have filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship" (Exod. xxxi. 3). So, too, in the Old Testament, men were inspired to *act* out the will of the Lord, as others were inspired to *write* out that same will; and as we read the lives of judges and prophets, as we see a Saul prophesying

at Bethel, or a Samson smiting the Philistines at Lehi, we see how "men of old" could be "moved by the Holy Ghost." *We* use the word, however, in a higher and more definite sense, as signifying that Divine influence resting upon the sacred writers "by which they were qualified to communicate moral and religious truth with authority." But what was the measure of this influence? Was it a fixed and constant quantity, measuring each sentence, weighing each word, no matter whether those sentences had to record some recent event, or whether they spoke of an event that was far away in the haze of the future? Was the Divine element an agitated sea, in which man's personality was drowned? Did that breath of inspiration disman the man, turning his mind into a silent cave with its stalactites of congealed thoughts, petrifying all that was human, turning it to a Memnon statue, an articulate stone? That was an opinion held by many, and held for a long time. "They neither spake nor wrote any word of their own, but uttered syllable by syllable as the Spirit put it into their mouths, no otherwise than the harp or the lute doth give a sound according to the direction of his hands that holdeth and striketh it with skill."

According to this view, the sacred writers were not persons, but things; not agents, but instruments; not penmen, but pens. Now to a certain extent this is true. We find sometimes an inspiration so overwhelming and complete that the agent is carried away; he is as though he were not; his thoughts are God's thoughts, his words are God's words. The man is nothing but an Æolian lyre, vibrating

to the breath of the Spirit. When the son of Beor sees in his trance the "star rising out of Jacob," when we find his own will overborne by a stronger will, when we see the curses of his heart transmuted by a strange alchemy into blessings that the unwilling lips fling down upon the white tents of Israel, we see something not unlike the so-called *mania* of olden times. When we find prophets minutely describing events that still lie veiled by intervening years; or when we see men suddenly carried over all laws of association and of thought, speaking words whose meaning they themselves cannot guess, we see an inspiration of the highest type; the human is lost in the Divine. These are the ecstasies of a Pythoness; the tripod now standing not in the temple of Apollo, but in the temple of Christ; the inspiration flowing not from fumes of sulphur nor from waters that have trickled down Parnassus, but coming down from above, borne on those diviner waters that flow from Calvary.

But all Scripture is not thus given. Sometimes the Divine element sinks out of sight, and the human appears prominent, as in the historical books of the Old Testament. These would not require any special gift or power from on high. They are not laws beyond the wit of man to devise; they are not the record of events long since buried in oblivion, nor the foretelling of events yet to come: they are simple unvarnished statements of facts, in no wise differing from other historical records. They do not demand credence on the ground that they were inspired, but simply on the ground that they are true. Grant that they are faithful histories, and you want nothing

more; no degree of inspiration would give them any additional weight. It is evident, then, that when we speak of these sacred writers as being inspired, we do not mean that the inspiration was in all cases the same, that they were under the Divine influence in equal measure. It was the same Divine power, but it operated in different degrees and in different modes. The Jews were wont to make a distinction between the prophets proper and the *hagiographi*—the sacred writers. The one wrote, so they say, under the inspiration of *suggestion*, the Divine Spirit giving them some *visum propheticum*, some manifest vision, and then inditing the very words. The others wrote under an inspiration of *direction*, the Divine Spirit giving them a thesis, and directing them as to what events they should record and what they should omit; but leaving them to seek and use what extraneous helps they might see fit, yet at the same time guarding them from error in their use of them. When, then, St. Peter tells us that “*holy men of old spake as they were moved (φερόμενοι) by the Holy Ghost*” (2 Pet. i. 21), he does not mean that they were carried out of themselves, beyond themselves,—mere straws borne along on an impetuous torrent: there was still room for research and for the play of all the human faculties. How intimate may be this blending of the human and Divine, St. Paul himself shews us; for in one of his Epistles (1 Cor. vii.), when writing of the manifest will of God, he stays to interject an opinion of his own. He confesses that he is not sure as to its being the will of God. “*I think* also that I have the Spirit of God” (ver. 40); and he takes care to guard these doubtful points with

the parentheses, "after my judgment"—"I speak this by permission, and not by commandment" (ver. 6). The written Word comes to us like the Incarnate Logos wearing an Eastern, a Jewish dress; but beneath that dress is the twofold nature joined in indissoluble union. Now, as we gaze upon it, we hear the accents of human speech, we see the lines of human care; and we cry with Pilate, "Behold the man!" Then, again, it shines in such transcendent glory—the outward dress wearing a glittering whiteness which no fuller's art can rival—that we bow before it with devoutest homage, and our hearts, subdued and awed, can only cry, "My Lord and my God!" The human and the Divine form but one Word, and, like the Incarnate Word, it is but the outer voice of the inner heart of God—Infinite Love vocalized so that man may hear it.

Following the division we have already made, the Four Gospels would come under the *inspiration of direction*; the Divine Spirit selecting these four Evangelists in preference to others, "moving" them to take up the task, and then qualifying them for it. St. Luke prefaces his Gospel with the reason that led him to engage in the work; and, as we read it, we see a thought germinating in the mind, growing up into a blade of desire, then developing into an ear of resolve, and at last ripening into the full corn of deliberate determined action. It is a human mind we see at work—the ordinary processes of human thought. But whence came that "Forasmuch"? Who sowed in his mind this springing and germinant thought? Here we come back directly to the mysterious line where the human and the Divine

are merged in each other. In the Four Gospels we have not four lives, but four sides of one life, written by four separate men, from four different stand-points, and, as is very probable, with four distinct aims. Now it is impossible that this can be done without apparent discrepancies. No four men could sit down and write a life, even in our age of pens and paper—when nearly everything is committed to writing—without presenting what we should call anomalies and contradictions. Let two witnesses appear in a court of law, both spectators of the same occurrence, let them describe it exactly in the same words, and their evidence would be weakened by the suspicion of collusion. Apparent differences in parts are a strong proof of the genuineness of the whole. We grant that there are these discrepancies in the narratives of the Four Gospels; nay, more, we affirm that, if our Gospels be true, these discrepancies of statement *must* be there as a matter of necessity. And it is just here that a due recognition of the human element in the Gospels is so important; it is the missing link that binds in one compact whole an otherwise broken chain.

(1) Now we may expect that each Gospel, while telling accurately the story of the life of Christ, will have a peculiar colouring borrowed *from the life of the writer*. In studying men we must remember that what we call character is a sum total, the resultant of many factors. The very skies under which a man is born exert an influence upon his life. The physical aspects of the country impinge upon his mind; and when a Bunyan grows up by the sluggish Ouse, hard by the undrained fens, it is one of the



freaks of Nature which make us marvel. He who would paint a Baptist—the stern and rough ascetic—must take for his background the rugged hills of Judæa and the Jordan wilderness. And especially upon our language do the surroundings of our life exert an influence. “Speak, that I may know you,” said Socrates, to one who was hiding behind the mask of silence. Go where we will our dialect will bewray us; the scenes and incidents of our life will filter through our speech. Running through the poetry of Mrs. Hemans we hear those undertones of the “ever-sounding and mysterious main;” and as we turn over those leaves, they fan us with the cool crisp sea-air. If we turn to Wordsworth we get amongst the quiet pastorals, the liquid music of the mountain stream and an air redolent of clover and of lilac. If we turn to the Psalms of David we find word-photographs of all those scenes that filled up his eventful life, from the cave of Adullam to the heights and solitudes of the hill Mizah.

*(To be continued.)*

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*MORALITY VERSUS REVELATION.*

THE very air we breathe is loaded with doubt. We can hardly take up a public journal or a magazine without lighting on some reference to the scepticism of the time; we can hardly talk with our neighbours without hearing some objection raised to a point of Christian doctrine, or some bold assumption that the supernatural elements of the Faith have been for ever discredited by the discoveries of Science, or some timid foreboding that the waves of Scepticism will run higher and higher until they imperil even