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applies itself, as it were, with the composure and sedateness of an old man, to the study of natural knowledge, to gravity of manners, and to the cultivating of severer learning."

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ARTICLE VI.

INFALLIBLE SCRIPTURE.

BY THE REV. E. F. BURR, D.D., LYME, CT.

Of late years it has been given out that the progress of Biblical study has made it necessary to revise our theory of Inspiration. It is said that the high ground taken by our fathers cannot be maintained. We have fallen on an age of careful and well-equipped criticism. Germany has examined and spoken. The teachings of the Westminster and other great confessions, of Gausson and Doddridge and Edwards and Knapp, were premature, ill-considered, and must be largely modified in the light of a riper scholarship and fuller knowledge. In particular, we are warned that we cannot now insist on the inerrancy of the Scriptures, even of the originals, as to historic and scientific matters, and the smaller details of all sorts; that it is altogether safer, and more in the line of recent findings, to speak of the Scriptures as *containing* a divine message than as *being* such a message. And so we are told, perhaps with bald outspokenness and perhaps under various disguises of reverent and orthodox phrase, of the mistakes of Moses and Matthew, of Peter and Paul, and

even of the Lord Jesus himself. Not a few are reluctant to speak out. They prefer to put things in a mild and unalarming way. "The old truth must have restatement to adapt it to these times;" but when we come to examine closely, we find that it is not the old truth at all, but rather an old foe with a new face. What appears is a restatement; what is behind it is a mild form of infidelity—if there can be such a thing. And all in the name of the (almost) twentieth century and new light!

Pray, what *are* the new facts? What great discoveries have made necessary this great change of base? Has it just been discovered that our copies of the Scriptures differ somewhat among themselves? Has it just come to the knowledge of the public that quotations from the Old Testament by the Master and his disciples were not always in the exact original words? Was it within the present century, or the last, that the people found out that every sacred penman has his peculiarities of both thought and expression? Certainly, such facts were as well known to the fathers as they are to us. And yet those fathers stood up for the entire infallibility of the original Scriptures; also for the practical identity of the copies in their possession with the originals. They saw no inconsistency in doing so.

Nor do we. The ancient theory does not suppose that the Bible has been kept from *all* changes, but only from all *harmful* ones; supposes that the differences between copies are, all things considered, of no consequence whatever, bringing into question not a single item of doctrine or duty. The ancient theory does not suppose that there is only one best way of saying the same thing; but, on the contrary, supposes that there may be several such ways, all equally forcible and desirable. The ancient theory does not suppose that the infallible God, who made men after so many different patterns, is not able to express infallible truth in as many different patterns of literature, each in harmony with the natural characteris-

tics of the writer; but supposes, and has good reason to suppose, the exact contrary. Indeed, it is by no means the plainest thing in the world that the facts on which the advocates of lax theories of inspiration stumble, and which they put forward as compelling to such theories, are inconsistent with even that most exacting theory of verbal inspiration which regards the sacred writers as mere amanuenses, setting down automatically *ipsissima verba* as doled out to them by the irresistible Spirit.

However this may be, they certainly are not inconsistent with the two following propositions which I propose to sustain—propositions which seem to me necessary to be sustained if we are to have a Bible that deserves the name.

I. By means of a divine influence the original Scriptures were secured from error in all their statements of whatever kind; so that their verdict in any matter was final.

II. Our present Scriptures are, for all practical purposes, exact copies of the original Scriptures.

I. The Assyrians, Babylonians, Greeks, Romans, and other ancient peoples who had no sacred books, nevertheless held that Deity had sent messages to men by haruspices, priests, sybils; by dreams, omens, supernatural voices, inspirations. And the original message was always supposed to represent *perfectly* the thought of the deity from whom it came. It might be marred in passing through second and third hands; but the message at first hand, whether in this way or in that, whether by responses of oracles, as at Delphi and Dodona, or by the teaching of priesthoods supposed to be official custodians of sacred knowledge and mouth-pieces of divinity, whether relating to fact or doctrine or practice, was accepted as in every particular as truthful and authoritative as the Divinity himself.

Similar to these are the views generally taken of the sacred books now extant in the world by those who ac-

cept them as sacred. They are thought to be not only messages from the supernatural, but also messages that are as infallible on all matters of which they affirm as the supernatural itself. More especially is this thought of the original documents.

Max Müller writes of the Rig-Veda as follows: "According to the orthodox views of Indian theologians, not a single line of the Veda was the work of human authors. The whole Veda is, in some way or other, the work of deity; and even those who received the revelation or, as they explain it, those who saw it, were not supposed to be ordinary mortals, but beings raised above the level of ordinary humanity and less liable to error, therefore, in the reception of revealed truth. The views entertained of revelation by the orthodox theologians of India are far more minute and elaborate than those of the most extreme advocates of verbal inspiration in Europe. The human element is driven out of every corner and hiding place; and, as the Veda is held to have existed in the mind of the Deity before the beginning of time, every allusion to historical events, of which there are not a few, is explained away with a zeal and ingenuity worthy of a better cause. If the laws of Manu, or any other work of authority, can be proved on any point to be at variance with a single passage of the Veda, their authority is at once overruled."

The Koran is held by Mohammedans to have descended entire from heaven on the "night of power," and to have been faithfully translated by Mohammed with divine help. According to the Mormons, the "Book of Mormon" was divinely written on plates of gold, every word of it; and then the whole literally done into English with absolutely perfect accuracy, by Joseph Smith, under a divine inspiration.

As to the Tripitaka of the Buddhists, the Zendavesta of the Persians, the Kings of Confucius, the Tao-te-King of the Taoists, the Sutras of the Gains, the Granth of the

Sikhs—they are all, like the Veda and the Koran, revered by their respective votaries as pure truth without the least mixture of error. Whatever they assert is to be taken without question, whatever it may seem to contradict. Be the matter great or small, it makes no difference. An infallible judge has spoken. Nothing remains to be said. There is no higher court of appeal.

It is well known that the Jews as a nation have always held to a plenary inspiration of the Old Testament. In their view, the writings of Moses and of the other prophets, as they came from the first hands, were altogether free from mistakes. Not only each sentence, but each individual word—nay, each individual letter was a sacred thing to them. They largely wore scripture verses as amulets on their foreheads and over their hearts. However poorly at times they have practiced their Bible, their theory in regard to it has always been of the highest sort. Just as the political motto of some nations is: "The king can do no wrong," so the national motto of Israel, from time out of mind, has been that the Law and the Prophets and the Psalms are the king of books, and a king that never errs. "How firmly," says Josephus, "we have given credit to those books of our own nation is evident from what we do; for during so many ages as have already passed no one has been so bold as either to add anything to them, to take anything from them, or to make any change in them."

Such, also, has been the view taken by Christians generally of both the Old and the New Testament. In every age of its history, the Christian church at large has not only accepted them as *containing* an infallible divine message, but as *being* such a message in its original documents. No mistake whatever in any of their statements. Just as soon as one has found out what Moses and Matthew, Jeremiah and John, and the other Scripture writers actually wrote, the sole business before him is one of interpretation. The truth without any mixture of error is

before him. He has only to unlock the gates of speech in order to find it. Such has always been the view of the great body of Christians. To them the verdict of genuine Scripture on any matter whatever has been perfectly decisive. Whatever they could prove by it was proved absolutely. Nothing remained to be said. They hushed their controversies. They bowed even to the ground before the majesty of "Thus saith the Lord." They counted the man a heretic, not to say a blasphemer, who could come near saying: "Moses spoke here only the myths of his time," or: "Matthew doubtless was misled as to the facts in this case by his vocation as a publican," or: "Paul's reasonings at this point are inconclusive." Such language has sometimes been ventured on by men calling themselves Christians, especially in Germany, but it has always been heard with a shudder by the great Christian communions and confessions.

So the bulk of mankind has agreed in these two things: *first*, that the world has a message from the supernatural; and *second*, that this message as first delivered was in every particular as reliable as the source from which it came.

What means this great plebiscitum? What means this universal faith in an infallible message from the supernatural, this chain of such faiths stretching away back into the mists of history and even the adyta of primeval tradition, this chain that never lessens or weakens as it passes through the more enlightened times and lands? Have we not here the instinctive judgments of mankind as to what sort of a divine message mankind needs and is likely to receive? Have we not here, perhaps, a divine testimony to the fathers of the race, so emphatic and so agreeable to what one would expect, that it has followed the race in all its dispersions and generations down to the present time with unflinching constancy?

It cannot be denied that universal beliefs are not always just. But they are very apt to be—so apt that in

practical life they are always accepted as just, in the absence of all positive evidence to the contrary. This point I have fully illustrated elsewhere. Suffice it now to say that the fact or the philosophy that is witnessed to by the general voice of mankind confessedly deserves great respect with logicians, and usually gets what it deserves, occupies a vantage ground from which a considerable force will be required to dislodge it, especially if the great world-voice does not waver, but rather grows firmer as it issues from the lips of the wiser and better peoples, and especially if it cannot be thought suggested by superficial appearances, like the notion generally held in the past, that the heavens make a daily circuit about the earth. And such is the voice under consideration. Its vast chorus of testimony to a divine message at least as infallible as the source from which it comes, speaks forth a weighty presumption. Of two things in all other respects equal, that which has in its favor the suffrages of mankind at large would be universally conceded to have greatly the advantage of its fellow. In the present case, since we have even more than the lack of positive evidence that the wide suffrage comes from the weak and perverse in human nature (from its ignorance and depravity), it is but fair to think that it comes from the better elements; that it comes from the pressure of the actual fact as revealed, or as shining by its own light in the universal, though sometimes dim, sense of what man needs to receive and God needs to give.

This general consent of the world as to the degree of inspiration belonging to a divine message is fortified, so far as our Scriptures are concerned, by another consensus.

The general voice of the Christian church, of which we have spoken, is entitled to great weight. With insignificant exceptions, Christians have always held that, by means of a divine influence, the original Scripture documents were secured from error in all their teachings of



whatever kind; so that their verdict on any matter was perfectly authoritative and final. Has an undoubted canonical passage pronounced upon it? Then it is *settled*, beyond dispute. Let no one open his mouth further. No matter how trivial the subject may seem; no matter what the topic—whether fact or doctrine, whether sacred or secular, whether prose or poetry, whether chronology or history or science or religion; all debate is cut off. All heads bow silently to the judge that ends the strife. Let no one presume to utter or think against that verdict, distinguishing between great and small, important and unimportant, religious and secular. “Such,” says Rawlinson, “has been the teaching of the church of Christ from the first.”

A presumption—Is it not a great deal more?—that the original Scriptures were accurate in even their smallest statements is given by the fact that a multitude of minute and, seemingly, least important biblical statements, even in our often translated and copied Bible, have been verified by the exploration of recent times; while in no case has any undoubted biblical statement been shown to be incorrect—whether it be historical, topographical, ethnological, ethnographical, or scientific; for, strange as it may seem, there may be very small scientific matters.

Perhaps the most satisfactory way, as it certainly is the most economical one as regards time and space, of substantiating this assertion is to cite the testimony of one of the most illustrious, learned, and conscientious of modern scholars as found in Rawlinson’s “Historical Evidences.” This work contains the following statements: “My own studies, which have lain for the last eight or nine years almost exclusively in the field of ancient history, have convinced me more and more of the thorough truthfulness and faithful accuracy of the historical scriptures. Circumstances have given me an intimate knowledge of the whole course of recent cuneiform and (to some extent) of hieroglyphical discovery; and I have

been continually struck with the removal of difficulties, the accession of light, the multiplication of minute points of agreement between the sacred and profane, resulting from the advances made in decyphering the Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, and Egyptian records."

"There is an argument of immense compass deducible from the indirect and incidental points of agreement between the Mosaic records and the best profane authorities. And this is an argument to which modern research is perpetually adding fresh weight. Above all, the absence of any counter-evidence, the fact that each accession to our knowledge of the ancient times, whether historic or geographic or ethnic, helps to remove difficulties and to produce a perpetual supply of fresh illustrations of the Mosaic narrative, while fresh difficulties are not at the same time brought to light, all tends to show that we possess in the Pentateuch not only the most authentic account of ancient times that has come down to us, but a history absolutely and in every respect true."

"It is not possible to produce from authentic history any contradiction of this or any other portion of the Hebrew records. When such a contradiction has seemed to be found, it has invariably happened that in the progress of historical inquiry the author from whom it proceeds has lost credit, and finally come to be regarded as an utterly untrustworthy authority."

"It is evident that the entire historical frame-work in which the Gospel is set is real; that the facts of the civil history, small and great, are true. To suppose that there is this minute historical accuracy in all the accessories of the story, and that the story itself is mythic, is absurd."

"A comparison of its secondary or incidental facts with the civil history of the times as otherwise known to us reveals an agreement so multitudinous and so minute as to constitute, in the eyes of all those who are capable of weighing historical evidence, an overwhelming argument in proof of the authenticity of the whole story."

Such are the testimonies. We have in them the fruit of years of scholarly investigation condensed into a pemmican of honest statement. We may safely say that it correctly represents the facts. That minute accuracy, in even the most assailed parts of the Scriptures, to which it testifies, in regard to all the numerous points of the past which modern researches have thus far been able to uncover, is sufficient warrant for assuming their accuracy at all other points. If Schliemann digs up an old helmet at Mycene, and, on cleaning it at many of the least conspicuous points, finds only pure gold, is he not warranted in thinking he has a gold helmet? If one should find in ancient Chaldaea, or at Travancore, a chart of the heavens, and, on testing it by thousands of stars of all sizes, taken at random from all parts of the sky, should find them all correctly placed, would he not feel entitled to assume the correctness of the chart throughout? It would be folly to require him to verify by actual measurement every single stellar position. Not a star-chart in the world has been verified in this way. And yet the Berlin charts are built on confidently in every observatory and nautical almanac in both hemispheres. If it is scientific to do this, why is it not scientific to allow a like broad induction of facts to convince us of the accuracy of the entire original Scriptures on all matters of which they speak, without regard to the science of magnitude?

And, then, the Scriptures claim entire trustworthiness for themselves—claim it after the broadest and most exacting fashion.

As to the New Testament. Its various books were written by the immediate disciples of Christ. This fact is on the face of most of the books, and has the support of uncounteracted tradition. To deny it is practically to deny that we can know who were the authors of any ancient books, or even of very modern ones. So the New Testament was written by the immediate disciples of Christ.

Now this book testifies that Christ commissioned his immediate disciples to become the religious teachers of mankind; that he promised the Holy Spirit to thoroughly qualify them for their work; that, on particular occasions (as when brought before magistrates and on that day of Pentecost when they preached in tongues unknown to themselves) the very words and syntax of their message were divinely supplied to them; that, in short, they were so furnished for their work that their master could say to them, "He that heareth you heareth me," and "It is not ye that speak, but the spirit of my Father that speaketh in you," and so that Paul could say, "We speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth." While making such representations, the sacred writers give no vague hint whatever that they might be unreliable to some extent in minor matters. Not a word, even the slightest, that any discount whatever should be made from their unqualified teachings, either oral or written, in the exercise of their ministry. Under these circumstances the primitive Christians must have felt bound to accept, without exception, whatever these broadly commissioned teachers gave them as from the master. Especially in formal writings designed to be a text book of religion to all future times. If anything from Christ's immediate disciples was *ex cathedra*, such a text book was. To reject a large part of it under color of a vague distinction between things primary and secondary, things more and less important, things religious and semi-religious or secular, without any distinct boundary line between the two, would have been as unnatural as unwarrantable—in fact, would logically have put their whole Scripture under suspicion and shadow, and set it a-trembling like an aspen. As a matter of history, as we have seen, the church has never received the New Testament after such a fractional, discounting, and confusing a fashion. As far back as church-opinion can be traced, a

plain Scripture on any point whatever, great or small in seeming, has been held absolutely decisive. It has had always the prerogative of the last word.

As to the Old Testament, its absolute and entire trustworthiness has sufficient proof in the attitude of Christ and the New Testament toward it. Not only is it called the "Holy Scriptures," "The Word of God," "The Oracles of God;" not only are its writers spoken of as "holy men of God who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost," while no hint whatever is given that certain parts are to be taken "*cum grano salis*," and that the common Jewish opinion in regard to it needed to be somewhat lowered; not only does the New Testament do this, but Paul says that he "believes *all things* written in the Law and the Prophets;" while the Master himself declares that "not one jot or tittle of the Law [at least the five books of Moses] shall fail," and that "whosoever shall break one of these least commandments [facts in the form of precepts] and shall teach men so shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven."

• Evidently, the writers of the New Testament, as well as their master, in quoting from the Old Testament regarded a matter as *settled* when they could bring to bear on it a clear passage from their Bible—this without regard to topic or seeming magnitude. They did not think it necessary to measure carefully its true dimensions, or estimate its weight and quality to remote decimals before accepting the Bible deliverance concerning it.

If the sacred writers had only a partial inspiration, were open to mistake in a part of their deliverances, they were bound in all honesty to say as much, and to put their readers on their guard. They should have said, for substance, "We are inspired and secured from error as to *main* things; but as to other matters we are like other people." But, instead of this, their claim to be received as bringing a divine message is entirely unqualified. It is

couched in the broadest and most emphatic terms. Not a whisper, not a gesture, not a look even, of warning comes to us from any one of the sacred writers, either in regard to himself or to his brethren of the canon; but, on the contrary, such language and tone are used as must have been understood to endorse completely the current opinion of the time, and indeed of all times, as to sacred books. If a part of the ground we have to travel over is morass and liable to let us through at every step, though there are no surface-indications of the fact, let the authorities at least set up by the road some notification of danger that we may be on the alert. Let them put out somewhere a red light.

This is what Paul is supposed by some to have done. In one or two instances he is thought to express some hesitation as to whether, in regard to certain matters, he has "the mind of the Spirit." But his scrupulousness as to these specified matters assures us that he felt sure as to the divine authority of all his other statements, which received no qualification whatever: assures us that if any of them had been open to doubt he would have given fair warning: in fact, assures us that the other sacred writers, under similar circumstances, would have done as much. The fact that they suggest no doubt whatever is proof that they entertained none.

So much as to what the Scriptures claim for themselves. Now let us see what consequences are involved in adopting the alternative theory of inspiration, viz., that the original Scriptures were infallible only in main things.

This theory seems to open the door for nullifying a large part of the Bible. Main things in a book, as well as in everything else, are always in a minority,—a very small minority. The details and circumstantialia of a picture always occupy the most space,—by far the most. Besides, it is no easy matter to decide where "main" things end, and the secondary and subordinate begin. They shade away into each other as day does into night.

Different men would draw the dividing line very differently. There are those who regard the Deity of Christ, his atonement, his mediation, regeneration, a future state of rewards and punishments, as anything but essential to a scheme of reasonable religion. And, then, do not things seemingly very small often turn out to have very important connections—a little pivot proving essential to the integrity and working of a great engine? Sermons, and even books, can be written on the importance of little things. Whether or not the cackling of geese once saved Rome, it is certain that the weight of a feather sometimes decides a hesitating balance or battle, and that a last straw may break a camel's back. Such facts trouble us when we are trying to distinguish between the important and unimportant, the more important and the less, in Scripture. It *looks* small; but then may it not be the small rudder that steers some "tall admiral," and so a whole squadron of dependent ships; or a small seed which in time will wave harvests over half a continent? So a cloud of uncertainty settles down on by far the larger part of the Bible. We cannot accept a single verse as infallible until we have proved it to be highly important; and then what room for different views as to what *is* important? Almost everywhere the ground under our feet seems to be on a tremble. What our fathers thought to be a rock turns out to be a bog. Can it be that God has given us such a Revelation?

If the contemporaries of the original scripture documents had found them unreliable in regard to by far the larger part of their statements, even though these statements were of the circumstantial and secondary sort, would they not have been reasonably stumbled as to the rest? Could they well have been blamed for withholding confidence from the entire thing? It would have been the scientific thing to do. In similar circumstances we moderns would feel compelled by universally accepted laws of evidence to do it.

But the theory that the original Bible was infallible only in main things, contradicts the theory on which biblical scholars proceed in dealing with the text of Scripture. The whole effort of textual critics is to find out what the autographs were. This is considered immensely important, the great *desideratum*, deserving of almost unlimited pains. And, indeed, so say all devout scholars and the intelligent Christian public; for they feel that the nearer they get to the autographs the nearer they get to the exact truth. But all parties are mistaken if only "the more important" Bible statements have a divine warrant. In that case by far the larger part, say ninety-nine hundredths of the whole Scripture is not one whit more trustworthy than the copies made from them; indeed less so, as being the product of a less critical and enlightened age. What is the use of scholars worrying themselves about the genuineness of secondary matters when, even if proved genuine, they would be of no account as scripture? The latest variations are, at least, fully as likely to be correct as the originals. As a whole the Bible has sunk to the level of other books: Samson and Milo are as other men. So far as getting at the truth is concerned, the critics have accomplished just nothing by all their labors. They have wasted any amount of time, talent, toil. Their rummagings in old monasteries; their disinterment of codices, cursive and uncial; their collations and recensions innumerable; their science of textual criticism and cognates, elaborated with infinite labor in closets and convocations and revision-committees,—amount to nothing that the general Christian public values one jot. Such a public has little patience with this much ado about nothing. Why do they spend money for that which is not bread? "The game is not worth the candle." Their true course would be first to find (if that is possible) what are the main or more important passages in our present Bibles, and then confine inquiries to the question of *their* genuineness. As these, from the nature of the case, can



be only a small fraction of the whole, an immense saving of time and work would be effected.

But some prefer to speak of inspiration as belonging only to the "moral and religious" parts of the Bible. We complain of the vagueness of such language. What is meant by the words "moral and religious"? Plainly, not everything that can be made to yield moral and religious lessons; for that would include not only everything found in the Bible, but also everything in every other book and in the whole world of events. From stars to stones, from the motions of armies to those of atoms, religion may be argued into, or away from, them all. Are duties together with their underlying doctrines meant? In that case it is plain that there is a vast amount of matter in the Bible that cannot be clearly brought under either of these heads. Duties depend largely on facts and circumstances; if the latter are unreliable the former are so also to the same extent. Also, beyond a certain point it becomes doubtful what doctrines underlie given duties. A field for endless dispute opens. The entire Bible becomes debatable ground, a sort of Terra del Fuego of fogs and clouds and desperate uninhabitableness the whole miserable year round.

But what do they really have in their thought—these men who speak of inspiration as belonging solely to the moral and religious things of the Bible? They certainly do not mean the whole Bible: they mean *limitation*. And we have only to listen to them a little, to see that they mean to exclude from the area of infallible inspiration matters of historic detail; of manners and customs; of arts, sciences and chronology; in general and vaguely, all matters of the "less important" sort that fill up the outlines of Scripture, that make the flesh and blood and bloom that cover its skeleton and give it verisimilitude. But it is not altogether easy to tell when one comes to the skeleton. And certainly what is outside of it would, in the view of most people, include the greater

part of the Bible, especially of the Old Testament. And rightly; for it is impossible to prove *clearly*, on purely rational grounds (to which, of course, we must be confined), that most of the Bible statements have any closer connection with morals and religion than have those in our common histories, or those events in our daily lives which yield moral and religious lessons to so few. A few devout and ingenious minds will smite water out of rock, and command the very stones into bread. But to most people they will remain mere stones.

So an open door is left for a man to exclude from the inspired matter of the Bible whatever suits him. To some God and religion appear in everything; to others they appear in almost nothing. The great majority are slow to perceive the spiritual and religious in what passes under their observation. A few see sermons in stones; but the most see stones in sermons. Who does not know that God and religion are apt to remain unsuggested to most men even by his grandest works and most signal providences? Such persons would find in the Bible a minimum of the moral and religious, and a maximum of the other sort.

Further, it seems clear that the theory that the original Bible was infallible only in main things, or, if you please, in things moral and religious, would, if fairly understood and adopted by the people at large, completely destroy the authority of the Scriptures among them. Suppose a minister should stand up in his pulpit, and, holding up a bible, should say to his congregation: "This book originally contained, here and there at great intervals, something that was divine and not open to mistake; but men have never been able to say with any confidence, save in a few instances, just where these green spots are; and, as for the rest (by far the greater part of the whole), why, it is as purely human and fallible as any common book. Indeed, this book has a special drawback in being the

product of comparatively very uncritical and unenlightened times." I say, suppose our clergy should talk after this fashion to their people. What would come of it? Doubtless, at first, a wide opening of the eyes. "We have heard strange things to-day, things which neither we nor our fathers have known. But one thing is clear: if these ministers are right, they no longer have a vocation. A clear divine warrant for their function and support can no longer be pleaded. We can dispense with them. That will be a very considerable and acceptable economy. But *are* these views correct?" Just as soon as the people conclude to say Yes, how much weight will the Bible have with them? It will no longer be to them a Bible at all. Its prestige is all gone. The scepter has fallen from its hand. It is wholly without authority—its promises a mirage, its penalties a *brutum fulmen*. It may continue to interest as an heirloom, a piece of antiquity, a literary curiosity, a companion volume to the books of Confucius and Zoroaster, a book with a somewhat famous history; but as an authoritative rule of faith and practice, it will have no force whatever. The only scepter left in the hand of Christ will be a mocking reed. Such a book could not answer the purpose of a divine message. It is not such a revelation as the world needs. It is incredible that God has given such a thing to the world under a warrant of "signs and wonders." It would not be worth the giving.

To the doctrine of the inerrancy of the original Scriptures, the following objections may be made:—

1. Many trivialities, puerilities, and even some indecencies are found in all copies of the Scriptures, and so presumably belonged to the originals: can it be that the inspiration which did not secure against such things secured against error in even the smallest matters?

We admit that there are things in the Bible that *seem*, at first view, to be all these—things the use of which we do not see, and even things which propriety, according to present usage, forbids to be publicly read. But this is

only what we observe in Nature. Nature abounds in things that seem trivial, and in some that will not bear promiscuous exhibition. Every natural fact has a setting of small particulars, and must be given in more or less of its natural setting in order to verisimilitude. Also, things, seemingly very trifling, often turn out to be pivotal, like some of the small and obscure but yet essential parts of a watch. Also times and countries differ much in their ideas of what is indelicate; and the expressions in the Bible which are complained of are no worse than the facts, and are really no more suggestive of evil than the words "male and female," "fornication," "adultery," and many other such words in current and unblamed use among us, and which are indispensable in the fight against vice and crime. It is quite credible that certain physiological facts which the young *must* learn sooner or later, had better be first learned in sacred connections and as set amid the solemn sanctions and menaces of religion.

2. What is the use of having the original Scriptures more secured from error than the copies? The copies are to a certain extent fallible. This implies fallibility to a like extent in the originals; for what is the use of having them more accurate?

We answer: It is the use of having a perfectly solid foundation for a great edifice; of having a perfectly pure fountain to supply the successive reservoirs and pipes of a great city; of having a perfect standard of weights or measures to which to refer for verification; of having a final court of appeals able to revise the proceedings of all other courts, and decide cases righteously as well as finally.

We answer: It is the use of having a Bible more reliable than merely human commentaries on it, or than the intelligent faculties of the readers. If there is no use in having the original documents less fallible than the copies, then, on the same principle, there is no use in having the copies less fallible than are its uninspired readers and

interpreters. As these are all fallible, according to our Protestant view, the Bible at once sinks to the level of a fallible human production.

We answer: It is the use of having a Bible mainly secure from error, instead of a Bible mainly open to error, the use of having a Bible whose deliverances are unreliable only in an infinitesimal part of the whole, and that part providentially indicated to us and guaranteed to be inconsequential, instead of one whose deliverances are unreliable in almost every part, and on almost every point.

If only the copies are liable to error, then we have to discount from the infallibility of the book only at the points where the copies so differ among themselves as to make it hard to choose between them; but if the original Scriptures were themselves liable to error in all secondary matters, then (as such matters make up by far the greater part of every book, and it is no easy matter after a certain point to distinguish between things primary and secondary) the greater part of the Bible passes under a cloud.

This, then, seems the proper doctrine. The original Scriptures, as they came fresh from the hands of the sacred penmen, were infallible in all their statements of whatever sort. One asks whether this doctrine implies a strictly verbal inspiration, a divine giving of each particular word with its collocation. Not necessarily. If, in any case, there is only one best way of saying what needs to be said, then that way must be secured by a strictly verbal inspiration. But wherever there are several such ways, ways equally good of saying the same thing (and this, it would seem, must often happen), it is enough if the sacred writer is kept to any one of these ways. Within their range he is at liberty to choose his own words and his own syntax. He is not limited to specific individuals, only to a specific class. That is, *some* divine dictation as to words must always exist, but

in many cases this need not extend to the dictation of individual words with their collocation. As a traveller may have the choice of several roads to a city instead of being shut up to a single one; as a planet may vary its orbit considerably between fixed terms, instead of always traversing exactly the same line; as a prisoner may have the range of an entire house, or city, or province, instead of being confined to a single cell: so the sacred writers had a certain range of literary expression within which they could not go amiss or fall short of the best, instead of having their feet fast in the stocks of a single formula. They were not like the king around whom a Roman ambassador drew closely a circle which must not be crossed till an answer had been given, but rather like that king as he would have been if that circle had followed the whole round of the city walls.

II. Our present Scriptures are, practically, faithful copies of the originals.

In by far the greater part of the scripture text, say nine hundred and ninety-nine thousandths of the whole, the copies agree with one another. This larger part is therefore, like the originals. So we judge in the case of all other ancient books. What all the copies of Herodotus conspire in saying, Herodotus himself said.

At points where the copies disagree with one another, textual criticism can, in a great number of cases, determine what was the original text beyond all reasonable doubt. This is a modest statement. No doubt extravagant claims have often been made as to what the science of textual criticism can do. "Never such a detective! It can hunt down a rogue of an error through all the centuries and find it under all disguises." But, without going such lengths, without conceding omniscience or infallibility to this or any other class of scientists, we are bound to allow that sound principles exist which enable scholars in a multitude of cases satisfactorily to determine among rival readings that which is genuine. So we

may make a large addition to the likeness between our present Bible and the original documents.

As to the residuum after the resources of criticism for determining the genuine have been exhausted, we find it to be exceedingly small, largely inconsequential to all appearances, actually (as all Christian scholars agree) bringing into doubt no single item of doctrine or duty, and fully accounted for without supposing in our present Bibles any whit of abatement from the authority and usefulness of the original Scriptures.

For, to preserve this authority and usefulness, it is not necessary that every word, or even every construction of the original, be preserved. In many cases there are several equally good ways of saying the same thing. An author is often at a loss which to choose among the different modes of expression that occur to him. He cannot see but that one is just as clear and forcible as another. And, if his name is Thomas Chalmers, he may end his hesitation by using them all. Seventeen reproductions of the same idea have been counted in one of his paragraphs, each differing from every other in language, and all just, forcible, and brilliant. Just as the same person may appear to equal advantage in several different dresses, so a thought may not suffer in the least from having one form of expression exchanged for another. So Jesus and the writers of the New Testament evidently thought; for, in their quotations from the Old Testament, they are not always careful to use the exact words of even the Septuagint. They content themselves with giving what they regard as equivalent expressions. So the Decalogue, as given in Deuteronomy, differs verbally somewhat from that given in Exodus. The sense is the same; the dress varies. Evidently the sacred writers themselves were not in bondage to the letter. They certainly thought that in some cases there were two or more equally good ways of saying the same thing, even as the same pure water may come to us in vessels of many

shapes and materials. If this is so, we can fully account for a considerable part of the residual passages just spoken of without supposing that the Bible has suffered in the slightest from our inability to reproduce exactly the originals. The substitutes may be just as good as the primaries for all scriptural purposes. Just as the substitute whom a man sends into the army may do quite as good service as himself, and the army be none the worse for the exchange.

But the residuum does not consist entirely of passages giving the same thought under different forms. Some give different senses. But can it be that it may be of no earthly consequence which of these various senses is taken as the original? Even so. All the *facts* of the original, as well as all its words, may not need to be preserved from mistake and doubt in order to its being preserved from damage. Many facts may be stated merely as the actual dress and circumstantialia of other facts, as the flesh and blood required to make the skeleton of truth life-like and presentable, as the filling-in of the outlines of the picture for the purpose of naturalness and verisimilitude. For this purpose other facts of a similar order might serve equally well. For example, 968 years as the age of Methuselah might do as well as 969 years. It is true that, for reasons already stated, it would be a hard matter for *us* to draw the line between important and unimportant variations; but that there *may* be unimportant ones is plain; and what they are would be determined by what God allows to take place. We do not have to draw the line. He draws it for us.

Besides facts which merely serve to give verisimilitude, and which may be exchanged without loss for others serving that purpose equally well, there are others of which as much can be said. Just as a fact may be useful to a person at one time and not at another, so a fact may be useful to one age of the world and not to another age. It is outgrown. It is superannuated.



From lapse of time and change of circumstances, the use has fallen out of it. Or, if not so, its place has become well supplied by something else. Why may it not be so with "some Scripture passages"? For example, some passages relating to some points in the superseded Mosaic economy. If we find it impossible to determine satisfactorily the original sense of such a passage why may we not suppose that, though once of use to be known, it is so no longer? It has had its day. Or sufficient substitutes exist in other parts of Scripture. It is easy to see that no damage whatever might come to us from not-being able to settle a few points like these. If we had to find out these inconsequential points for ourselves we should be in straits. But here the providence of God steps in to help us. He marks for us the passages whose original sense it will do us no harm to be without. What he allows to become indeterminate through various readings, or whatever cause, he thereby certifies to be unimportant for *us*, whatever it may have been for other times.

This, then, is our theory. Words and syntaxes in Scripture, as elsewhere, may vary to a certain extent without damage to the sense. Without damage, also, the sense itself may vary somewhat. But in no case has the varying been suffered to go beyond this harmless extent without detection. What this extent is, is shown by those passages in regard to which there remains a reasonable doubt of their genuineness after the resources of criticism have been exhausted upon them. Providence does for us what we could not do for ourselves, It becomes an omniscient detective. It hunts down for us both the words and the senses which can safely vary, puts its sign-manual upon them, and then says: "This is what you do not need to know, at least for the present." So we hold that, for all practical purposes, the present Bible is a faithful transcript of the original documents. After doing our best to find the words and thoughts of a

passage as they stood in the autographs, and doing it unsuccessfully, we say to ourselves reasonably: "It is not of any consequence, at least for the present, that we should know. If it were, the Lord would not have suffered the text to fall into this helpless doubt."

This view is confirmed by the manner in which Christ and his apostles treated the bible of their time. This was a translation and a copy,—a copy of copies, the last survivor of many generations of copies, the last link in a long chain that had come down through the glooms and tossings of many troublous centuries. But Christ treated it as if it were an autograph. Not a hint but that it possessed all the reliability and authority of the primitive parchments. Not one word about a harmful uncertainty in a text that had passed through so many hands. What explanation of this so good as that no such harmful uncertainty existed? He had no need to caution. For all practical purposes the copy was as good as the original, while yet wet under the writers' hands, would have been. Divine Providence had so watched over the book that, though in the lapse of ages various changes in the text had taken place, not one of these changes was of the sort to vitiate in the slightest the book as a religious guide. So Christ, in speaking of the Septuagint Bible of his day, had no need to distinguish between it and the original autographs. He did not so distinguish. He treated both as being one and the same thing. He took it for granted that the people about him were doing the same. They were. Whatever rights belonged to the first king they allowed to his lineal successor of their own day.