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THE  
BIBLIOTHECA SACRA.

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ARTICLE I.

AUTHENTICITY AND INSPIRATION OF THE  
SCRIPTURES.<sup>1</sup>

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I.

AUTHENTICITY.

1. THE Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments purport to contain revelations or communications from God to man. They are a history of his manifestations to the race. No more important question can arise than this: What place in our study of religion and theology are we to give to these Scriptures? Are they a true record of the events and communications which they present? If they are substantially correct, if the events which they record really occurred, then the Scriptures must be accepted as the chief source of our knowledge of God, and of religion. They are a revelation of God to men.

2. Our inquiry then is as to the *truth* of the Scripture record. But here we need to discriminate. We have no occasion to inquire as to the truth of the general ethical

[<sup>1</sup> This article consists of chapters vii. and ix. from a forthcoming volume comprising the lectures upon Systematic Theology which President Fairchild has been in the habit of giving to his classes.—EDS.]

teachings of the Scriptures; for example, the ten commandments, or the sermon on the mount, or of other prominent statements of ethical principles. We know these to be true, in the nature of the case. That they come to us by God's direct intervention, is an interesting and important fact; but this is not essential to our conviction of their truth. We know the Scriptures to be ethically true, by a direct survey of their contents.

The same can be said of the great essential doctrines of religion contained in the Scriptures. They are seen to be true in their own light. That God exists, the creator and ruler of the universe, infinite in wisdom and power, and perfect in goodness; that men come under the law of obligation, the law of God, and are responsible to him in reference to all their conduct; that they are bound to reverence and worship him, to love him supremely, and their neighbors as themselves—these great doctrines we know to be true. A revelation may give higher motives to the performance of these duties, but does not change the obligation. These fundamental points of doctrine and of duty are not involved in our inquiry as to the truth of the Scriptures.

The essential point of the inquiry is, are the Scriptures historically true? Is the record which they give of the manifestations of God to men, in the history of the Jewish people, and in the advent and life and teachings of Jesus Christ, an authentic and reliable record? Are the Scriptures essentially true as history? But here let us observe that absolute truthfulness is not necessarily required. If the Scriptures are essentially true—that is, true as other ancient historical writings, then they contain a revelation from God, and we have a revealed religion.

3. Again, the received Scriptures are composed of many parts. We have not only the Old Testament and the New, the first containing the ancient Hebrew writings, the last the later Greek writings, but these again are made up

of many books, sixty-six in all, written by different authors, in different ages, some more distinctly connected with the history of God's manifestations than others, each book having its own special evidence, and resting on its own foundation. The truth or falsity of one of these books does not necessarily involve the others. We might not be able to establish the truth of a score of these, and still the essential historical truth of the Scriptures might stand. Indeed, if one of the Gospels can be shown to be historically true, then Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has come into the world, and Christianity is established as a divinely revealed religion.

It is true that if one of the Gospels be historically true then other large portions of the Scriptures must be also true, and there can be very little question about any essential portion; and Christianity cannot be invalidated by setting aside any less essential part. We must not confound the question of the essential historical truthfulness of the Scriptures with the determination of what is called the sacred canon; that is, the settlement of the question, what books are to be accepted as belonging to the sacred record. The determination of the canon is an important work; but any doubt which may attach to this question does not pertain to the fundamental question of the truthfulness of the Scriptures, or of Christianity itself. The determination of the canon belongs to Biblical literature rather than to theology proper.

4. We are not to overlook the fact that the unity and interdependence of the different parts of the Scriptures are such that if any considerable or characteristic portion be accepted as true, it is scarcely possible to question the rest; and nothing is made against Christianity by such questioning. Admit the Gospels, then the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles follow. The New Testament carries with it the Old, and either of these essential parts gives us revealed religion, with all its essential doctrines.

5. In our inquiry as to the historical truthfulness of the Scriptures, it is better to begin with the New Testament, especially with the Gospels. They come nearer to us in time, and thus are more fully connected with the historical period. The facts they present are more accessible to us. It will be easy to pass from the New Testament to the Old. This is the natural method, but not the necessary one. It would not be difficult to find sufficient direct evidence of the historical credibility of the Old Testament. The materials for such an argument are abundant, and modern research is continually adding to our resources in this direction.

6. The primary question then is, are the historical books of the New Testament a truthful record of events? Are they reliable history? In pursuing this inquiry we can only touch the salient points and present a mere outline of the argument. To expand these points, or present them minutely, would furnish work for an entire theological course. It would require a volume for each prominent point in the argument.

The inquiry might here be made, why single out these ancient writings of the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures, as the objects of investigation, rather than other sacred books which exist in the world—the Vedas of the Brahmin, the Zend-Avesta of the Parsee, the Soutras of the Buddhist, the Koran of the Mohammedan? The answer is, simply, because of the importance of the contents of these Greek and Hebrew Scriptures. No other books can compare with them, in this respect. The other books, in comparison, are not historical to any considerable extent, and are not weighty in their contents. It matters little what their origin may be. We will accept them for what they are worth; and this seems to be very little. The highest compliment that can be offered to any of these books is to find some faint resemblance, in some minute portion, to a passage of our sacred Scriptures. If we have any books that come with

divine authority, and are worthy of the attention of the world, they are the books of the Christian Scriptures.

7. It is a strong argument in favor of the historical truth of the Gospels, that for ages they have been received as history, and that this reception began in the region where the events are said to have occurred, and in the same age, or as near to it as research can bring us. Their historical truthfulness is the natural explanation of this fact. Such a fact throws the burden of proof upon the objector; he must ascribe some other origin for the books than their historical truthfulness. He must maintain that they are a fiction, composed for entertainment, or with a sinister purpose, to impose a false religion upon men; or they are the natural outgrowth of a religious enthusiasm. Some such theory must be maintained by one who denies the truthfulness of the Scriptures; but it will be found to be a mere hypothesis, utterly improbable in itself and unsustained by any evidence. Considerations like the following set aside forever such a hypothesis.

(1) The books are ancient and can be traced back to the times of the events which they record. Very ancient manuscripts of the books are found, proving the existence of the books as early as A. D. 350. Translations into the Latin and Syriac were made near the close of the second century. The Peshito, a Syriac version, is traced back to the latter part of the second century. The Latin Vulgate, prepared by Jerome in the fourth century, was rendered necessary by the great variety of Latin texts then in existence.

References to the books, and quotations from them, can be found in the writings of Origen, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Irenæus, and Justin Martyr, showing that the books were in existence, and were widely diffused, and relied upon as authority, as early as the first half of the second century. So wide a diffusion, in that age, would have required all the time available between the middle of the first

and of the second century of the Christian era. Thus the books are sufficiently ancient to justify the claim that they were written by men familiar with the facts, and associated with Christ and the Apostles.

(2) The style and matter of the books connect them with the period and the country, and the surroundings in which Jesus Christ must have lived. This gives them a historical character, and shows that they were written by men familiar with the facts.

In the first place the language, or dialect, is peculiar. It is Hebraistic Greek, used in Palestine by men of Hebrew culture who had learned Greek. This dialect disappeared with the conquest of Palestine by the Romans. There was no call for it after the first century.

Again, the geographical references show such familiarity with the country as could come only from residence in it. These references are numerous and minute, easy to a resident, but impossible even to a learned man of another country, or another age. Our most cultivated writers go astray when speaking of a distant land. The researches of many ages have verified these references.

The same may be said of the historical references; their exactness has been proved. They are abundant, involving various nations besides the Jewish, namely, the Egyptians, Arabians, Persians, Scythians and Romans. The accuracy of these references proves that the writers were in contact with these nationalities, and obtained their knowledge directly, not by studying them at a distance. This general statement must of course be vague; particulars would be more satisfactory and impressive.

Still again, the archæology of the books, their references to habits and customs, domestic, social and public, are too numerous, minute, and accurate, to be explained upon any supposition but that of familiar, personal acquaintance, on the part of the writers. Designations of divisions of

time, of weights and measures, Jewish, Grecian, Roman, are all accurate and in place; and the mingled civilizations of the time and the country made this a very complicated problem. In such particulars the best trained writers fail, when speaking of things with which they are not familiar by life-long association. The books of the New Testament, and indeed of the Scriptures generally, are specially open to these tests because they are historical and treat abundantly of men and things, of times and persons. In this respect they differ from other sacred books, which indulge chiefly in dreams and visions and speculations.

These considerations prove beyond question, that the writers lived in the time, and the land, of the events which they profess to record. Their works have the character of history.

8. But our chief interest gathers about the question of the historical reality of Jesus Christ. The books give his character and teaching and career; is this genuine history? Did such a being appear upon this earth, and pursue essentially the career which the Gospels ascribe to him? We must answer this question affirmatively, for the following reasons:—

(1) The character of Jesus Christ is not a human invention. The reality alone can account for the presentation. It was too elevated to be even comprehended by his disciples who walked with him. The character has stood for ages a mark for criticism, with every motive on the part of men to disparage and vilify it; yet it has never been successfully challenged. The modern attempts to depreciate it are all based upon the assumption that we must allow nothing supernatural in the person and origin of Jesus. This is a baseless assumption, utterly at war with the true spirit of inquiry. The character, as it stands, vindicates itself; and Christians and unbelievers alike have, through all the ages, acknowledged its perfection. We can see the beauty when



placed before us; we could not originate, or carry out, the conception. The absolute purity of motive, the absence of the least semblance of self-exaltation; the calm dignity of his bearing, never marred by a hasty or ill-considered word or look; this dignity and simplicity maintained in all emergencies; his marvelous power, never used for display or for any private end; his deeds always appropriate to his position and claims; his words so fit and profound and weighty; his divine meekness and gentleness, coupled with a majestic weight and firmness of character—all these, we can see, are just as they should have been; and then his death, to human estimation so shameful and forbidding, but majestic and glorious in the outcome—the whole scene sustained and carried through with absolutely perfect consistency and propriety, —what human thought could invent such a character and career?

(2) The utterances of Jesus are just as impossible, as a human invention, as his character and life. No one could devise them, without such wisdom and spiritual insight as characterized him. They impressed men at the time: "All bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth;" "They were astonished at his doctrine; for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes;" "Never man spake like this man." The words of Jesus have been the delight and the surprise and inspiration of all ages. What impostor or enthusiast uttered them? For, if there was no real Jesus, some man produced these sermons and parables, and all the utterances which contain the very substance and essence of spiritual truth. Who invented the sermon on the mount, or the parable of the prodigal son, or the Lord's prayer, or the discourse of Jesus with his disciples at the supper, or his last prayer? The men did not live, and have never lived, that could give us these treasures. They are not an invention.

(3) The marvelous combination of the human and the divine in the presentation of Jesus Christ, is not a human invention. The idea of a demigod is not remote from human thought. It characterizes the ancient mythology, but the result is merely a man with some unusual attributes, some extravagance of action or character, like Hercules or Vulcan; but such a blending of the divine and the human, of the infinite and the finite as we find in the person of Jesus Christ, is beyond man's devising. He seems to hold nature in his hand—"commands the wind and the sea and they obey him;" yet he yields to violence and death like any mortal. He places himself by the side of God in exaltation and wisdom; "All things that the Father hath are mine;" "Neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him;" "That all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father which hath sent him;" still he prays, "if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt." He admits his limitations,—“But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.”

The terms Son of man and Son of God, are used in reference to Jesus Christ, with a delicacy and discrimination that could not be expected in a fiction. Jesus calls himself the Son of man, when his divinity is implied, and his humanity affirmed. His disciples never called him the Son of man. Peter says, "We believe and are sure that thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus calls himself the Son of God when he wishes to affirm his divine nature to one who has not known him, as to the man born blind: "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" But when he calls himself the Son of man, he does not speak simply as a man, but with claims to all divine prerogatives; "The Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins;" "The Son of man is

Lord even of the Sabbath day;" "The Son of man shall come in his glory, and all his holy angels with him;" "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you." The usage is very remarkable and profoundly discriminating, true to nature and to the facts, but utterly beyond the reach of fiction or human invention. In the presence of the facts the usage takes care of itself. As an invention it could not appear. Multitudes read the Scriptures without observing it. No such conception as that of the divine and the human in Jesus, ever entered the imagination of men. The Gospels scarcely state it dogmatically. They contain it, wrought into their very substance. It must have been a sublime reality. From these considerations, which might be greatly extended, we are compelled to accept the historical reality of Jesus Christ, his nature, his character, his teachings, his career. As a fiction, the Christ of the Gospels is an impossibility.

John Stuart Mill, never suspected of any bias toward Christianity, in his *Essays on Religion* (page 245), writes as follows: "It is of no use to say that Christ as exhibited in the Gospels is not historical, and that we know not how much of what is admirable has been superadded by the tradition of his followers. The tradition of followers suffices to insert any number of marvels, and may have inserted all the miracles reputed to have been wrought by Christ; but who among his disciples, or among their proselytes, were capable of inventing the sayings ascribed to Jesus, or of imagining the life and character revealed in the Gospels? Certainly not the fishermen of Galilee; as certainly not St. Paul, whose character and idiosyncrasies are of a totally different sort. Still less the early Christian writers, in whom nothing is more evident than that all the good which was in them was derived, as they always professed, from a higher source."

(4) Still further, when we contemplate the doctrines of

the New Testament—its ethical and religious teachings, we find them too exalted for human invention. Regard them as proceeding from a being as exalted and perfect as Jesus, and they are explained; any other explanation fails. Where were the men to devise such a system of truth—of religion and morality, placed in exact adjustment to each other, and in their true dependence, giving us a morality for all time, touching the very foundation principles of righteousness, never mistaking the formal or technical for the real; and a religion simple, wholesome, reasonable, and natural, placing God upon the throne of the universe, infinite in power, wisdom and goodness—an infinite Father, and making religious duty to consist in a hearty obedience to his commands, without a trace of formalism or asceticism? All this is reasonable, and commends itself to the human understanding when it is presented. But whence came the discernment to apprehend and present these truths?

The great principles of righteousness are unquestionably within the reach of the human understanding; and they have been stated at times with more or less of success. But the multiform applications of these in practical duty, and life, without failure or aberration—whence came all this? There was no civilization, or system of philosophy, from which it could spring. There were no men who could devise and present it. It was not an invention, but it came to us with the great teacher, Jesus Christ. Here was its historical origin, and there is no other possible explanation. The morality and religion of the Old Testament Scriptures present similar characteristics and claims.

9. When we come to contemporary historians we find comparatively little light upon Jesus and the apostles. Suetonius, Tacitus, and Pliny the younger, in the latter half of the first century, and the first of the second, briefly refer to the Christians as “a mischievous sect.” Suetonius speaks of them as punished by Nero. Tacitus does the same, and

speaks of Christus, the founder of the sect, as put to death in Judea by the procurator, Pontius Pilate. Pliny was governor of Pontus, in Asia Minor, and found Christians around him in great numbers. He wrote an account of them to Trajan, asking what he should do with them. He describes their habits of worship, as he had learned them from those who had renounced Christianity: "On a certain day of the week they gathered together, before the rising of the sun, and sung a hymn to Christ as to a God. At a later hour they gathered again, and took a simple meal together, and took an oath together, not to commit any crime, but to abstain from all crimes, as theft, robbery, adultery."

Josephus, a Jew associated with the Roman generals that made the conquest of the Holy Land, and destroyed Jerusalem, must have known something of Christ and of Christians. But the only paragraph in his writings that speaks of Christ is generally supposed to be spurious: "Now there was about this time, Jesus, a wise man (if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works), a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. He was the Christ, and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men among us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at first did not forsake him, for he appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and a thousand other wonderful things concerning him. And the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day." (Ant. 18, 3, 3.) Those who regard this passage from Josephus as spurious, do it on the assumption that if he had been willing to say so much of Christ and Christians, he would have said more. Thus, written history gives us little light.

But the great fact that Christianity, starting from that centre, spread over all the Western world, and changed the

whole tide of history, requires, as an explanation, such events as those which the Gospels record. Christendom proves the historical reality of Christ, and confirms the New Testament history. Whence came that change upon the world from paganism and Judaism to Christianity? If we had no New Testament history, we should be obliged to assume essentially the facts which that history presents. The Gospels explain Christendom, its origin, its extension, its institutions and monuments, and its entire history. Aside from these there is no explanation, and can be none.

Suggestion has sometimes been made that the books produced Christendom. This is impossible; fiction has no such power. The books and Christendom alike, sprung from the facts, from the history. The New Testament, then, is historically true, and Christianity is the true religion, divinely set forth in the person and teaching and work of Jesus Christ. Nothing more can be needed to vindicate the historical reality of Christ and the essential truthfulness of the Gospels. Judaism and the Jews sustain a similar relation to the Old Testament. The existence of the Jews to-day, with their ideas and traditions, is proof of the Old Testament; that history is the only explanation of their existence. The land of Palestine is the "tenter bar" to which this double web of history fits. The books and the land belong together.

## II.

### INSPIRATION.

1. The question of the *Inspiration* of the Scriptures is quite distinct from that of their truthfulness. The Bible might be true, like a history of the United States or a work on science, and still not be inspired. If the Bible is true as history, it contains revelations—divine communications, such as the messages of the prophets, and the teachings of Jesus. A true Bible, un-inspired, would be an honest and intelligent

record of the communications of God to the people, through Moses and the prophets ; and of the words, deeds and life, of Jesus and of his disciples ; such as intelligent and truth-loving men might have written—a record like that which Xenophon gives of Socrates, or Tacitus of Agricola ; honest and true records which give us a generally correct idea of the facts they undertake to present. Any honest record of the Saviour's life and teaching would be valuable and precious to us. If there were even to come among us a man who had seen Jesus, and heard his words, how we should gather about him, and ask him to repeat all he knew ! But a full record, such as the Evangelists have given, is vastly more valuable. Next in value to an inspired gospel, would be an uninspired gospel, essentially true as history.

2. The truth of Christianity—its claim upon us as a revealed religion, does not turn upon the inspiration of the Scriptures. If one of the Gospels be true, as ordinary history, Christianity is true. God has revealed himself to men. Jesus Christ, the Emmanuel, has come into the world.

The question of inspiration, therefore, does not concern the unbeliever. We do not need to discuss the matter with him. It is a question which properly belongs to believers, and is not vital to the claims of Christianity. Christianity is historically proved, without reference to inspiration. It is reasonable to act upon facts resting upon common history, without inspiration. By such evidence we govern our conduct in all ordinary affairs. It is not reasonable to maintain the idea that we must defend inspiration against the unbeliever.

3. What then, more exactly, is the question of inspiration ? It is this : Were the sacred writers specially aided by the divine Spirit in making their record of the facts and truths which they presented ? Are the Scriptures merely an ordinary human record of these facts, or are they the result of special divine aid granted to the writers ? The doctrine

of the church has always been that the sacred writers were inspired—divinely guided. There have been differences of opinion as to the manner, and the degree, of the inspiration ; none as to the essential fact.

4. How shall the fact of inspiration be determined or investigated? Two lines of inquiry open to us. First, we may look at the work, and see the result. If the writers were supernaturally aided, their work may be expected to show it ; and it is not presumption for us to use our judgment upon the question. We know, in general, what mere human intelligence and ability can accomplish ; and if these books transcend such ability or wisdom, we shall be very likely to discover the fact. When we stand before a work of art, we can judge whether it exhibits unusual power and genius, without possessing any such genius ourselves. It is proper, then, for us to come to the Scriptures with this inquiry : Do they indicate supernatural aid in their character and style?

Secondly, we can inquire what these writers themselves thought about the matter. They were honest and earnest men, of well-balanced judgment. Did they regard themselves as inspired? Do the Scriptures themselves, in any of their statements, sustain the idea of inspiration? In either of these two ways we may obtain light on the question.

5. To follow out the first method: if the Scriptures were not inspired, what would be their character? They would be, in the main, historically true. The writers were honest and capable men, and believed what they wrote. They were in the midst of the events, and knew whereof they affirmed. They were fair witnesses ; hence the record of the Gospels would be, in the main, true, without inspiration.

But again, if the writers were controlled chiefly by their own impulse to write, and exercised simply their own faculties, these records would contain a considerable admixture



of mere human utterance—an expression of the thoughts and feelings and speculations of the writers themselves. They would entertain us with their own ideas and reflections. There is no subject on which men are more inclined to speculate than upon the facts and doctrines of religion. An uninspired Gospel would give us Christ's life and works and words, as men could understand and present them ; and we might expect to find, in addition, a considerable admixture of the thoughts and feelings and personal views of the writers themselves—things more or less reasonable; but some of them out of place, and requiring correction, or limitation. The collective judgment of the Church would naturally detect and drop these portions ; not drop them from the record, but from acceptance and regard. There would be parts which we should regard as Matthew's personal opinions, or John's imperfect conceptions.

6. But what are the facts in reference to these Gospels? They are simply transparent exhibitions of the words and deeds of Jesus. They set him before us, just as he stood before the writers, and enable us to see him as he was. They give us Jesus without note or comment of their own. We see nothing of Matthew, or Mark, or Luke, or John; nothing but the Master, in the simplicity and beauty and majesty of his character. It would be human to eulogize and magnify and glorify him. We find scarce a word of this. To let us see him as he was, seems to them the highest eulogy. It would have been human to stigmatize his enemies, to characterize them as they deserved. But we find no word of railing or reproach or bitterness. The facts are set forth, and the world is left to judge between Jesus and his enemies. It would have been human to comment on his discourses and parables, and to expatiate on his miracles; to speak of the profound impression made by his words and deeds. These human elements are not found in

the Gospels; and it must be a higher than human wisdom that has guarded them from such additions.

The disciples, in their imperfect enlightenment, and low worldly views, often misunderstood Jesus. They could not grasp his lofty character and mission. Some of the plainest statements in reference to his death and resurrection, several times repeated, they could not receive. How came they at length to understand that character, so as to give it in its beauty and power, without addition or abatement? The wisdom was more than human. A similar argument could be brought to bear in reference to other leading portions of the Scriptures, as the books of Moses and the prophets.

7. Now let us inquire what direct intimation there is, in the Scriptures, of this inspiration. Here the argument must assume the general truthfulness of the Scriptures, which we have already ascertained.

First, we have the Saviour's promise of the incoming of the Holy Spirit, and the spiritual enlightenment to result from this; John xiv. 26, "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." John xvi. 13, "When he, the Spirit of Truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth. . . . He shall take of mine and show it unto you." Luke xxiv. 49, "And behold I send the promise of my Father upon you; but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high." These are direct, comprehensive, promises to his disciples, of inspiration. The fulfillment of these promises began with the gift of the Spirit, on the day of Pentecost, and followed them through all their work. Their ideas and utterances were exalted by that bestowment. From that day on, they were inspired men, and they spake and taught in wonderful contrast with the stupidity and crudity which had before characterized them. Peter before the council, urging his

right and duty to speak what he had heard and seen, was a very different man from Peter as he appeared before this heavenly baptism.

In Matthew x. 19-20, we have another less general promise of inspiration: "But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak; for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you." They were to be inspired, on these important occasions, in the defense of the Gospel—not to save their own lives; this was not their anxiety; and they were distinctly told that this would not be the result. They were to speak in defense of the truth; to make such a presentation as would tend to the furtherance of the Gospel. This was Paul's satisfaction in speaking of his own imprisonment, and the defense he was enabled to make (Phil. i. 12). For this purpose inspiration was promised; and thus the promise would imply a wider application, and would cover the case of public teaching, and of writing the Gospel for coming generations.

The writers of the Gospels seem never to refer to their own inspiration; nor, in general, do the Scripture writers fall back upon a claim of inspiration, to secure acceptance of their writings. They present their message, and let it speak for itself. In 1 Cor. i. 12-13, Paul seems distinctly to make the claim for himself, and perhaps for his fellow-apostles: "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth, comparing spiritual things with spiritual." In Gal. i. 11-12, he claims revelation for himself, as well as inspiration. "I certify you, brethren, that the Gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but

by the revelation of Jesus Christ." Here the revelation and the inspiration were in the same person, and were essentially the same thing.

The idea of inspiration was familiar to the minds of the apostles, and of the people of that time. 2 Tim. iii. 16, "Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness." This Scripture was, of course, the Old Testament. 2 Peter i. 21, "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." Such expressions as these are common: "The Holy Ghost spake by the mouth of David;" "Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet."

8. The question of *degree of inspiration* has been abundantly discussed among Christian thinkers, and is, probably, still an unsolved problem—one of the most pressing at the present time. The doctrine which has prevailed, in modern times, in the Church, is that of plenary or full inspiration, involving the absolute truth of every statement made by the sacred writers, whether more or less important; geographical and historical, as well as doctrinal. This view implies that if we could ascertain, with certainty, the original Scripture statement, on any point, the fact of inspiration would guarantee its absolute correctness.

Another view, to which there is more or less tendency in our day, is that the Scriptures are inspired to such a degree as to present, with all required fullness and accuracy, the great truths which it is the purpose of the Scriptures to present; that is, the truths pertaining to God, and to man as related to God; not facts of geography, history or science; and if an error should appear, in these minuter matters, it would not disprove inspiration, nor sensibly detract from the value of the Scriptures. The first view might be called that of *absolute* inspiration, the second, that of *essen-*

*tial* inspiration. There are difficulties in the first view, that of absolute inspiration, which are coming to be more and more recognized in the Church, such as these :

(1) It is impossible to prove absolute inspiration, in the sense claimed. The Scriptures do not affirm it, and no other proof is possible. No human wisdom is competent to search it out in the Scriptures, and establish it, in reference to every affirmation. It might be safely claimed that there is marvelous accuracy, even in the geographical and historical statements, and marvelous wisdom in reference to all matters of science—such wisdom as seems to imply divine guidance ; securing the use of popular expressions such as are always appropriate, and the avoidance of all technical terms which imply a scientific theory. This claim might be reasonably maintained. But to go farther, and claim the absolute accuracy of all minute statements of fact, or the absolute harmony of all these statements with one another—this is a task which the broadest and most thorough scholarship in Scriptural learning would not undertake. Indeed, such scholars suppose they find minute statements, in the Scriptures, which they cannot reconcile with each other, or with the facts. The advocate of absolute inspiration disposes of these cases by assuming that, if we knew the facts perfectly, the difficulty would disappear. But this is not proved, and cannot be ; and absolute inspiration, to avail us as such, must be absolutely proved.

(2) But if the inspiration of the *original text* were absolute and complete, and were absolutely proved, no one can maintain that we have that original text, in every minute particular. Variations have crept in, and it is beyond human power to restore the original text. Here we find an element of uncertainty, in spite of absolute inspiration. We need divine authority for the text, in addition to the original inspiration.

Again, the canon has not been determined by inspira-

tion. It is given by the concurrent opinion of the Church—the result of human judgment ; and here is an element of uncertainty, from which absolute inspiration cannot relieve us.

Still again, there is no absolutely inspired translator or interpreter of the Scriptures : and honest and earnest and scholarly men differ widely upon the translation and interpretation of some important passages. Absolute inspiration does not tell us whether baptise means always, and only, immerse or not, or what is the exact force of the prepositions often connected with the word. What avails absolute inspiration in the presence of these difficulties ? We can only say the passage is absolutely true, if we could only be sure of its meaning.

Again, there are precepts in the Scriptures intended for all time and all places. There are others that are temporary in their application. Absolute inspiration does not help us here. When Paul recommends to the Corinthians to abstain from marriage, we all agree to the temporary application ; but when he says to them, “Let your women keep silence in the churches,” we do not so agree ; and absolute inspiration does not bring us relief. When the Saviour, at the last supper, distributes the bread and the wine, and says, “Do this in remembrance of me,” we regard the Lord’s supper as an established institution, or ordinance. When he washes his disciples’ feet, and says, “I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you,” we are disposed to regard it as a symbolical lesson for the hour, and not a permanent ordinance.

The result then seems to be that, in our use and application of the Scriptures, whatever theory of inspiration we adopt, we are not saved from the necessity of the exercise of our own judgment, and from the uncertainty thereby involved. The Scriptures are not given us to be used in a mechanical way, like an algebraic formula, or a carpenter’s

rule ; and even absolute inspiration could not secure to us such a use of the Scriptures. The two theories practically bring us to the same result, by somewhat different routes.

9. The question of *mode of inspiration* is less important than that of the degree of inspiration ; but the two questions are naturally connected.

(1) The idea has sometimes prevailed that the writers were mere amanuenses under the direction of the Holy Spirit, or like spiritual mediums, transmitting communications made to them. With this view is connected the idea of *verbal inspiration*—that even the words, as well as the thoughts, came to the writers by inspiration. Some who maintain verbal inspiration, hold that the words are varied according to the personal culture, and other peculiarities, of the writer, and still come by inspiration.

(2) Over against the theory of verbal inspiration, stands that of *dynamical inspiration*: that the writers were so elevated, and quickened and energized in their faculties, by the Spirit of God, that, in the use of their powers, thus quickened, they could accomplish what would otherwise have been impossible to them. Thus they were still in the exercise of their faculties, and obliged to put forth effort, as appears from the introduction to Luke's Gospel (Luke i. 1-4), "It seemed good to me also, having traced the course of all things accurately from the first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the certainty concerning the things wherein thou wast instructed."

10. The *value of inspiration* to us does not depend solely, or even chiefly, upon the fact of our ability to prove the inspiration. It has accomplished its purpose in giving us the Scriptures as they are. The sacred writers have spoken with the power and clearness and wisdom which we find in the Scriptures, by virtue of their inspiration; and we have the benefit of it, according to Luke xxi. 15, "For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adver-

saries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist." The clear utterance and the wisdom are found in the Scriptures, even if we fail to discern their source. A picture from Raphael does not lose its power, or value, because we cannot prove that it is his. It is satisfactory to know that the Bible is inspired, but if we could not prove the fact, or the degree, of the inspiration, it would be inspired all the same. In general we prove inspiration by the excellence of the Scriptures, and not their excellence by their inspiration. The excellence comes from the inspiration, not from the proof of it. Euclid's Elements of Geometry, brought from Arabia into Europe a thousand years ago, might have been given by inspiration; but if it had been, we should not need to prove the fact. The truth speaks for itself. So with the great body of Scripture teaching, like the parable of the prodigal son, or of the good Samaritan, or the sermon on the mount. The great mass of Scripture teaching is self-evident truth—known to be true from its own nature. It is inspiration which has given us such Scriptures; they could not have come without it.

11. *Difficulties in the Scriptures*, in the form of apparent discrepancies, or contradictions, or mistakes, have, properly, no more force than in any other collection of writings. They do not set aside revelation, or even inspiration. Rejectors of Christianity often parade these differences or discrepancies, as if they were valid reasons for rejecting the Scriptures; but we do not deal thus with other writings, and the proposal is utterly unreasonable. Such discrepancies, and even errors, were to be anticipated in a series of writings by so many different hands, preserved and transmitted through so many ages. The marvel is that these discrepancies and errors are so few, and so insignificant. They do not affect, in any appreciable degree, the essential teaching of the Scriptures. If they were ten-fold as important as they are, they could not set aside the Scriptures, or seriously de-



tract from their value. It is comparatively easy to find such difficulties, if one is so disposed. Ignorance is the only required qualification; and it requires knowledge to dispose of them. But the Scriptures are of such unquestionable value and excellence, that they could carry quite a load of this kind without essential detriment to their claims or their force. Those who maintain absolute inspiration, put themselves at a disadvantage. They feel obliged to explain every difficulty, or discrepancy, important or unimportant; because their theory makes no provision even for minute differences. The different accounts given in the Gospels of the healing of the blind men at Jericho, and of the anointing of the head, or of the feet, of Jesus at Bethany, do not properly touch the question of inspiration; but they might disturb the theory of absolute inspiration. With a less mechanical theory, these slight discrepancies and difficulties can be admitted without essential detriment. It is marvelous how few apparent contradictions and errors we find, when we sit down patiently to the task of seeking a reasonable explanation. We are not to imagine that the Scriptures are like a Prince Rupert's drop, or a Bologna flask, those curiosities of the laboratory, which fly into a thousand fragments with any slight scratch upon the surface.

12. There is a very general impression that the Old Testament involves great difficulties; that it is not only far inferior to the New, in its ethical doctrines and general tone, but that in many of its teachings, it is false and immoral. The opinion of Christ and the Apostles, in reference to the Old Testament, does not sustain this superficial idea. Matt. v. 17, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." We have no evidence that Jesus ever proposed to improve upon the great ethical principles presented in the Old Testament. The two command-

ments which he presents as the sum of all duty, he derives directly from the law and the prophets. The duty of love to our neighbors as ourselves, and of love to our enemy, he derives from the Old Testament. His opinion of the practical value of the ancient Scriptures is shown in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus: "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. . . . If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead." Paul's opinion of the Old Testament we find in 2 Tim. iii. 14-16: "And that from a child thou has known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation. . . . All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." Peter holds a somewhat similar view of the Old Testament: 2 Pet. i. 19-26, "We have also the word of prophecy made more sure, whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the daystar arise in your hearts; for the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."

Christ's sermon on the mount is sometimes supposed to justify this depreciation of the Old Testament; but such a view arises from a careless study of his criticisms. It is not the law as given in the Old Testament, which he calls in question; but the traditions and false interpretations and applications of the Jews, by which they had set aside the true spirit of the law. Such perversion of the law he charges upon them in Matthew xv. 3-6: "Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition." We do not find in the New Testament any disparagement of the Old, but a high place of authority and importance accorded to it.

13. A failure to discriminate between a declaration of the great *principles of righteousness* which are found in the Old Testament, and *special precepts* adapted to the needs of the Hebrew people, as civil enactments adapted to special conditions, has often obscured the judgment of men as to the morality of the Old Testament. The moral law, requiring love to God and love to man, is distinctly announced in the Old Testament, as clearly even as in the New ; but when practical legislation for the government of society is introduced, the precept seems often to fall below the standard of absolute righteousness. For example, the law of divorce, " If any man will put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement," was a precept given, as the Saviour tells us, because of the hardness of their hearts ; no higher statute could be wisely enforced. So with the provision of the cities of refuge, to secure to a homicide a fair trial against the avenger of blood. Why was not Moses directed to establish a court, and provide a trial by jury, for the supposed offender, near his own home ? Such provision was impossible. The people had not attained that degree of self-restraint and fair consideration which made such a proceeding available. The same is true of the system of servitude among the Hebrews ; it unquestionably had some of the elements of barbarism in it, and was in itself undesirable ; but the undesirable system could be regulated, and some of its evils abated. Thus, in all legislation for human society, many things must be tolerated, and regulated, that are not approved, and that are at length to pass away.

14. The failure to discriminate the historical element in the Scriptures, from the didactic, leads to a misunderstanding of their ethical teaching. The practices of good men of old are stated as facts ; their polygamy and other imperfect arrangements are presented, but they are not enjoined upon us, or endorsed. These practices may not have been sins to them, because of their comparative darkness ;

but they are not presented for our imitation. What Abraham and Isaac and Jacob did, are not rules of duty for us ; and it is a false application of Scripture to infer that what God does not seem to condemn in them, he approves of our doing. The attempt to justify slavery and wine-drinking from the Scriptures, rests upon such a misunderstanding ; and many well-meant efforts to bring the Bible to bear against slavery, and in favor of total abstinence, involve a similar misunderstanding. The Scriptures were not given to solve the problems of social life, or of every-day personal duty, for all time, except by presenting the great principles of duty, of service to God and man, and offering the highest incentives to its performance. The questions which gather about the subject of amusements, in our day, are settled in the Scriptures, only by inculcating the true spirit of the Christian life, and leaving the practical form of that life to the common Christian judgment. If the Bible had undertaken such a work as is often required of it, it would have been a failure ; because it could not be adapted to all men and all times.

15. To the superficial reader of the Old Testament, *the conquest of Canaan* by the people of Israel, at the command of God, appears offensive and even monstrous—repugnant to Christian morality, and dishonorable to God. A more careful study of the situation will show that the Canaanites were an apostate people with whom the Lord had long borne in their idolatry and oppression and cruelty. He had restrained Abraham and his descendants, for generations, from taking possession of the land, “because the iniquity of the Amorites was not yet full.” The Lord might have swept the people from the land by a famine or a pestilence ; but who can say that it was not a necessary lesson to the people of Israel, that they should be called upon to cooperate with Jehovah in his judgment upon a wicked and abandoned people? It was a necessary part of their disci-

pline, as it is to-day necessary for every people that they should be required to inflict proper punishment upon crime in their own land. If they are excused from such responsibility, they will themselves lapse into corruption. It is quite possible that, in carrying out the divine command, some of the people might conduct themselves as plunderers and murderers, instead of ministers of the divine judgment. Such men, like Achan, would fall under the condemnation of God.

The Imprecatory Psalms and similar Scriptures are often a stumbling-block. They belong to periods of violence, when righteous authority was in deadly conflict with rebellion and crime. They require stirring external conditions to bring out their appropriateness. During the war of the rebellion, Christian men appreciated them as they had not done before. We needed such a lesson read in the church every Sabbath morning, to prepare us for the services of the day, and the life of the week. The Bible would have been deficient to us, if these parts had been omitted.

16. In general we need to distinguish between *objective morality and essential righteousness*, in order to explain the conduct and the character of men as presented in the Scriptures, and even the divine requirements. That Abraham, for example, should have been called upon to offer up his son as a burnt offering, is shocking to our later views as inconsistent with the goodness of God ; and we are inclined to reject the idea that he could have made such a requirement. It brought no such shock to Abraham. That God required the sacrifice was all that he needed to know, and all that a good man would need to know to-day. In the interpretation and use of the Scriptures, all such facts and principles are to be borne in mind. Revelation and inspiration do not relieve us from the exercise of our judgment as to what is permanent and what is temporary, what is general and what is local; and, practically, such judgment will be brought to

bear, and will guide us in our use of the Scriptures, whatever our theory of inspiration may be.

Having considered, thus, the authority of the Scriptures, we may henceforth employ them, without reservation, in our study of God, his attributes and providence and government, and of man's relations to God.