The Inspiration of the Bible and Modern Criticism.

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"From a babe thou hast known the sacred writings which are able to make thee wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus. Every Scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness: that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work."—2 Tim. iii. 15–17. (R.V.)

The changes introduced by the Revisers in this passage have provoked some sharp criticism. They have been assailed not merely as pedantic and unnecessary, but as indicative of unsoundness in the faith. "At a period of prevailing unbelief in the inspiration of Scripture, nothing," it has been said, "but a real necessity would warrant any meddling with such a testimony as that contained in the Authorised Version to the inspiration of the Bible. We have hitherto been taught to believe," the writer continues, "that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for the several ends enunciated. The ancients clearly so interpreted St. Paul's words, and so do the most learned and thoughtful moderns. Every Scripture must needs mean every portion, and therefore the whole of Scripture." The critic, as is not unusual with him, furnishes the answer to his own criticism. If every Scripture must needs mean every portion, and therefore the whole of Scripture, there is no denial here of the inspiration of Scripture as a whole. Nor again is that inspiration less clearly asserted by the transference of the predicate to the attribute. It can make no difference as to the fact of inspiration whether I say, "All Scripture is inspired, and therefore profitable," or, "All Scripture, as inspired, is also profitable." In both cases the inspiration of Scripture remains. I assume in the one case what I assert in the other. Moreover, it is not true that the ancients clearly interpreted St. Paul's words in the sense of the Authorised Version, for Origen, the earliest of the Christian fathers who refers to them, paraphrases in the sense of the Revised Version, "Every Scripture as inspired of God, is profitable," and many ancient interpreters are on the same side. Among the moderns who have preferred the rendering adopted by the Revisers may be mentioned Luther, Erasmus, and Grotius, to say nothing of more recent commentators. But, in truth, it may be fairly argued that the Revisers' rendering goes beyond, rather than falls short, of the Authorised Version, in its assertion of the inspiration of Scripture. "Every Scripture inspired of God" refers plainly to the collection of sacred books of which St. Paul had already said that Timothy was acquainted with them from his earliest childhood. Every one of these sacred writings, he continues, each portion of that Divine library, as being full of the breath of God, has its purpose in teaching, controlling, guiding, disciplining the life, that the man of God, the Christian prophet, may be thoroughly equipped unto all good works.

What St. Paul here asserts as to the characteristic purport and scope of Divine revelation cannot be too carefully borne in mind. The writings of the Old Testament—for of these, of course, he is speaking, though his testimony concerning them may be extended to the New—are inspired of God; there is a Divine breath of life in them in a sense which appertains to no human composition. They are, as St. Stephen says, "living oracles," or, as Luther says, "they have hands and feet." They are not for an age, but for all time. They touch human life at every point. They grow with the growing ages. We cannot, indeed, define the nature of inspiration, any more than we can define the nature of life, but it may be felt if it cannot be analysed. And having this Divine life in them, the Scriptures manifest it by their purpose and their effects. St. Paul tells us that they are "able to make wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus," and that they are profitable for the whole education of the Christian life.

In other words, the whole meaning of the Old Testament may be summed up in two words—*redemption* and *sanctification*. On the one hand, it is one vast prophetic testimony to Christ, to His person, to His work, to His kingdom; on the other, it is the Divine method of teaching man through the facts of history and the various circumstances of life how to subdue the evil within him, and to become conformed in very truth to that image of God in which he was originally created. Whereas we are sometimes told that to insist upon any correspondence between prediction and fulfilment in the Old Testament is to degrade the ancient prophets to the level of the soothsayer or the gipsy fortune-teller, it would be much truer to say that the whole Old Testament is one vast prediction. From its first page to its last, it is occupied with one glorious hope. This is its marked and singular characteristic. No Jewish legislator, prophet, or singer ever looks back to the past with fond regret. Each looks forward with ardent longing for the advent of the coming Deliverer. This is the golden thread which runs through that marvellously diversified web of law and history, of

song and fable, of proverb and allegory, by which the Old Testament is marked. Christ is the sum and substance of all its law, its poetry, its ritual, its prophecies. The lives and devout aspirations of all holy men of old point to Him. Without Him these ancient writings, as St. Augustine says, have no point or meaning, but are flat, stale, and unprofitable. Behold Him in them all, and they become at once instinct with life and beauty; or, as the same Father profoundly says, "The New Testament is latent in the Old, the Old patent in the New."

Now I think we cannot too clearly or too firmly grasp the principle thus laid down by St. Paul. By inspiration we are to understand that influence of the Spirit of God upon the writers of the Old Testament, by which they were empowered to teach such spiritual truths, and in such measure as was necessary for the religious welfare of those whom they addressed. Inspiration does not imply that the writers were lifted altogether above the level of their contemporaries in matters of plainly secular import. They do not antedate the science of the nineteenth century. Marvellous as is their historical accuracy, it does not imply supernatural infusion of knowledge on subjects lying within their own observation. They were the faithful witnesses and recorders of the things which they themselves had seen and heard. But, unhappily, Christian apologists have not been content with this recognition of the Divine character of the Scriptures. They insist upon a certain ideal perfection to which the Scriptures themselves make no claim. They forget, or they deny, that these books come to us subject to the same accidents as other books. God has not been pleased to give us an infallible text. We must collate manuscripts; we must study versions; we must with much labour and skill construct a text; we must use our grammars and dictionaries if we would know the correct sense of difficult passages; and we must avail ourselves of all the ordinary methods of criticism if we would ascertain when the different books were written, to what authors they are to be assigned, how far they are original or of a composite character. In a word, we have this treasure in human vessels. The books are given us in a form which invites, and even compels, criticism, and we must be prepared without prejudice, without fear, without any *a priori* postulates, to face the problems which a critical study of them involves.

I wish to ask your attention to one or two salient instances in which these Old Testament writings have recently been made the subject of criticism. I ask you to do this in a spirit of perfect candour and perfect fearlessness. I ask you to do this, holding in my own heart the profound conviction that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God. I could no more doubt the existence of a Divine Author of Nature, than I could doubt the evidence of a Divine Author of Scripture. There may be, there are, difficulties in the one—as our greatest apologist, Bishop Butler, has reminded us—as there are mysteries in the other, that we cannot explain. Nature herself has her strange portents, her abnormal growths and developments, her hideous caricatures of animal and vegetable life. Are we, therefore, to say that these things are conclusive evidence that God is not the Author of Nature? No! the footsteps of Divinity are visible alike, both in Nature and in Scripture, and will surely be seen by the reverent eye and the patient and disciplined heart.

A very bold and novel theory has been started recently as to the form, structure, and dates of the Books of Moses and the Book of Joshua. The latest criticism declares not only that these books are of a composite character,—which is now very generally admitted,—but that they have been antedated by centuries, and that they are a strange conglomerate put together quite regardless of their true order. There may be a small nucleus of Mosaic legislation in Exodus, we are told, but even that is uncertain; Deuteronomy is a repetition and expansion of this by a prophetical writer in the time of Josiah or at the earliest in that of Manasseh; then comes the code of Ezekiel, then a portion of Leviticus, and then, lastly, the great bulk of the Levitical legislation, which, together with its historical setting, is as late as the times of Ezra and Nehemiah. This in brief outline is the theory. I cannot accept it myself, notwithstanding the learning with what it has been expounded, and notwithstanding the fact that several scholars, working quite independently, have arrived practically at the same results. It seems to me it can only be maintained by disregarding one set of facts, while stress is laid upon another. But then I believe also that it is not wholly devoid of foundation. The literary analysis of the Pentateuch (or Hexateuch) does lead us to the conclusion that it is not a homogeneous whole, but consists of several different documents which a later editor or editors have arranged in their present position. What is there, I ask, in such a view of its composition to alarm us? The composite character of the work is not necessarily at variance even with the Mosaic authorship of the greater portion. What more natural than that traditions should have been preserved in the family of Abraham, which Moses afterwards incorporated in his work? We know by comparison of the Books of Kings and Chronicles that there has been a large incorporation of such documents into the texture of these histories. Each writer appeals to earlier records in proof of his veracity. Even in the Hexateuch itself we find traces of similar appeals, quotations for instance, from the Book of

the Wars of Jehovah, from a Moabite ballad, from the Book of Jashar. And yet more than this. We observe, scattered over its pages, notices of events subsequent to the occupation of the land of Canaan, such as compel us to admit that, even if the bulk of the Pentateuch is Mosaic, the hand of an editor as late as the time of the Kings is discernible in bringing it into its present shape. How are we to deal with difficulties of this kind? Because we believe the books to be inspired, are we to resort to methods of explanation which we should be ashamed to resort to in dealing with a profane author, and bend and twist and force the facts into accordance with what we assume to be the exigencies of Divine revelation? Take the whole theory of the reconstruction of the six books. Is it, even in its extreme form, necessarily antagonistic to faith? Does it necessarily destroy the basis of any moral or spiritual truth? If it could be proved that the prophets were before the Law, would that make their teaching less valuable? Is the Old Testament, regarded as an instrument in the Divine education of the world, dependent altogether on the date of the books, or the certain authorship of any of them in its existing form?

We are told, indeed, that the Pentateuch itself claims to be the work of Moses. We are told that the authority of our Lord has for ever determined the question; for He acknowledged the Pentateuch as Mosaic, and His authority is sovereign and absolute. But where has Moses himself, where has our Lord, where have any of His apostles asserted that the whole Pentateuch in its present form was written by Moses? Of certain portions we are told that Moses "wrote them in a book"; of the law of Deuteronomy it is said, "Moses wrote this law," but not of the Book of Deuteronomy, "Moses wrote this book." Indeed, he could not have written the story of his own death. Our Lord, it is true, allows the Mosaic origin of the Law, "Moses gave you the law:" our Lord says explicitly, "Moses wrote of me," and quotes words of the Pentateuch as words of Moses; but He has nowhere asserted that each and every portion of the Pentateuch as we have it now came direct from the hand of the Jewish lawgiver, or that the Pentateuch was deposited by the side of the ark.

I will not enter on the question which has been so much debated of late as to the limitation of our Lord's human nature; though, unless there was some limitation I do not understand how it could be a perfect human nature at all. The subject is one on which we do well not to speak rashly. But even if we admit that He in His human nature had a supernatural illumination vouchsafed to Him as to the authorship and criticism of the sacred books, can we suppose that it was any part of His mission to settle questions like these? Would it not have led men's minds away from the eternal truth that He came to teach, if He had descended into the arena of critical disquisition? It was a moot question among the Rabbis of His day whether the Book of Ecclesiastes had been rightly received into the canon. Nowhere does He allude to the question of authorship or canonicity; nowhere does He quote it. In His citation of the books of the Old Testament He accepts the popular belief as to their authorship. How should He have done otherwise? To say this is not to imply that He was inferior in knowledge to modern critics, or that, "as a teacher of religion, He was a teacher of error." For even, if error there was, it was not one He thought it necessary to correct, it was not one that touched religion. There is only one place in the Gospels in which He has apparently pledged Himself to the authorship of a particular writing. He does say very emphatically of the 110th Psalm, as St. Mark and St. Luke give us the words, "David Himself saith"; but even of that statement the devout and saintly Neander can write that we are not driven to the alternative, either to accept the Davidic authorship or deny our Lord's infallibility and truthfulness; that even in that, His most explicit utterance, He may merely have adopted the current traditions of His time.

But, in truth, are we not all along fettering ourselves unnecessarily with theories? The Bible is not, as a matter of fact, composed on some ideal theory of perfection. The writers do sometimes allow themselves a freedom which must rudely shake our theories. I read, for instance, in the First Book of Chronicles (xvi. 8–22) that David delivered a certain psalm into the hands of Asaph and his brethren for use in the Temple services. When I examine that psalm, I find that it is made up of several others, of the 96th, 105th, 107th, and 106th. All of these psalms are most probably post-exilic; one, at least, is so beyond all question, for it contains a prayer to be gathered from the hand of the heathen. What am I to say to a fact like this? Am I to say the writer of Chronicles is misleading me, or shall I not rather say that He is merely reporting a certain tradition that David was the founder of the Levitical psalmody in the Temple; and that hence to the chronicler this composite psalm used in the Temple worship of his own day seemed to be a kind of summary or representation of what David had given into the hands of the Levitical choir? He was no critic, he took the tradition as he found it. What is there in this certain fact to shock our faith? Why not acknowledge that forms of composition are allowable in the Bible, which we all admit in profane authors to be allowable?

Again, as regards the use of different documents in the Bible, what is there to alarm us? Why should we hesitate to make the frank ad-

mission that at the very opening of our Bibles we do meet with different documents? Look at the first story of creation in Genesis. What a wonderful chapter it is! Regarded even as a piece of writing, there is nothing finer in literature. How perfect it is in its structure! What a majestic progression from its first word, "Let there be light," to its last, "Let us make man in our own image!" Amid all its variety, one great creative word gives it a sublime unity. It is like some great oratorio in which the dominant theme is never lost amid all the infinite compass and richness of its variations; or like some majestic cathedral whose harmonious proportions arrest the eye, where aisle answers to aisle, and shaft to shaft, and column to column, and all are held in submission to the master design, and where the sense of power and dignified repose are marvellously blended. And then pass from this to the second story of creation in the next chapter. How striking is the contrast! It is a tale of childhood, simple and unartificial. "The smell of fresh earth is on the breeze." The man formed, a solitary being out of the dust of the earth, the animals created and brought to him, that he may give them their names, and no helpmeet found among them all,—as it were an experiment made, and its failure recorded, —the deep sleep cast upon Adam, the woman formed out of the rib, the Lord God walking in the garden at the cool of the day, how infinite is the charm of the *naïveté*, and the childlikeness of the whole scene! But how unlike the stately march, the elaborate structure, the rhythmic balance and poise so conspicuous in the earlier story! Is it not clear that we have two documents? Do we lose anything by the admission? Do we not rather gain? Does not the richness, the beauty, the Divinity of the inspired narrative come out in livelier and more striking colours?

Shall I turn, for one moment, before I conclude, to the objections which are urged from the side of science? I am told by men who, standing in the foremost rank of scientific observers, are also devout believers in our Lord, that it is impossible to reconcile the story of creation as given in Genesis, except in its broad outlines, with the discoveries of science. Is it not enough for me to know that in its broad outlines, at all events, there is this correspondence? And shall I not be content with the fact that in moral grandeur it stands absolutely alone amongst the cosmogonies of the world? What are the sublime facts I learn from that magnificent prologue? The creation of the universe by the voice of the Almighty, as in opposition to all dualistic or Pantheistic speculations; the beginning of life as the immediate work of God; the matchless and perfect order; the gradual advance from lower forms and types of being to higher, until man is reached, the roof and crown of all; the lofty destiny of man as made in the image of God, and gifted with rule over all the creatures of His hands; the Divine approval resting visibly on the work at each stage thereof—in a word, these great truths, that a personal God is the Creator; that God is a God of order and love; that this glorious universe in all its parts is the work of His fingers, and not the offspring of a blind chance, or the evolution of an inexorable destiny; that there was a gradual preparation for man before he appeared upon the earth, and that there is a close and intimate relation between man and God. These are truths of religion which no science can ever touch; these are truths which are without parallel in the cosmogonies of other nations; truths such as no "Hebrew Descartes or Newton" could ever have discovered for himself. They are altogether out of the path and beyond the methods of human intelligence in its most patient endeavour or its most daring flight. They can only come of the inspiration of God. This is the marvel, that not one spiritual truth which is here asserted can be overturned. What, then, does it matter whether we can or cannot make out a scheme of reconciliation between Genesis and geology and astronomy? Of that first page of the Bible, as of every other, it is true that it is "able to make us wise unto salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus," and that "as given by inspiration of God it is profitable for our instruction."

The cardinal error of theologians, it seems to me, is this: that they will start with a theory. It is with theology as it was with science. The students of science began with their theories. The earth must be a flat surface. The earth must be the centre of the universe, and the sun and planets must revolve around it. So long as men insisted upon their theory, and bent and twisted the facts to suit that theory, the gates of knowledge were shut against them; but when they sat down with humble, teachable, reverent minds to ascertain what the laws of God s universe were, then patience and humility had their reward, then the mysteries of the universe were revealed to their gaze; then its glorious and perfect order were disclosed, and science went forth conquering and to conquer. And is it not so with the Bible? So long as we start with our theories of what the Bible ought to be, instead of humbly trying to ascertain what the Bible is, we shall assuredly only increase our doubts and difficulties, and give large room to unbelief. We have been told that the Bible must be free from every flaw of imperfection, and we find it is not so. We have been told that the Bible must be in accordance with the discoveries of science, and we find science says one thing and the Bible another. We have been told that discrepancies ought not to exist, and we find they do exist. And then, alas, too often with the

rejection of the theory that has broken down, there comes the rejection of the Bible also. Is it not better to admit the facts? Is it not better to discard the theory, and to fall back on the words of the great Apostle, "Every Scripture as inspired of God is also profitable for our spiritual edification."

It is the trial of our day that we are called to face these problems, and there must be some searchings of heart; but let us face them boldly! Above all things, let us be honest. That, believe me, is the truest reverence. True reverence does not consist in shutting our eyes to facts, or in dealing with the Bible in a way in which we should be ashamed to deal with secular writings. True reverence walks ever with fearless front because her eye is fixed upon God. We need not fear lest the authority of the Bible should be endangered. The Bible cannot be endangered except by the timidity or want of honesty of its defenders. Never let us deny facts whatever the conclusion may be to which they lead us. Facts are God's work. Criticism has its legitimate province. It may be an instrument in the hands of God for bringing us to a truer view of the Bible than that with which we have hitherto been content. We may be forced to admit that our theory is wrong. We cannot be forced to admit that the Bible is not a fountain of Divine wisdom, comfort, illumination, blessing to him who studies it with reverent, humble, prayerful heart. There is our safeguard. No criticism can be too searching, no investigation too thorough, provided that we have first sought on our knees for the illumination of that Holy Spirit by whom men of God spoke of old time, and whose presence makes every page luminous with unearthly light. "Open Thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law"—that prayer will never remain unanswered. Criticism and faith each asserting its own right, no longer antagonistic, but in perfect harmony and co-operation, will make the Bible speak to us with a voice more distinct, more powerful, more helpful than it has ever spoken before. It will be a new revelation to our age. We shall be led into all the truth, and know with full assurance of conviction, and to our great and endless comfort, that "every Scripture as inspired of God is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto every good work."

Dr. Maclaren's New Book.

The Holy of Holies. By ALEXANDER MACLAREN, D.D. London: Alexander & Shepheard. 1890. 5s.

WHEN Dr. Maclaren of Manchester was in Australia recently, he said that he attributed any use or influence which he had been able to exert, in the direction of stimulating and influencing young ministers, to two things. First, hard work at the Hebrew Bible and Greek Testament. For many years after his college life he had never let a day pass without reading a chapter in each, and if those who could do so laid this down as a rule of life, and drew their teaching from the true foundation of spiritual power, the word of God in the Holy Bible, they would not miss their mark. Secondly, to the fact that from the beginning of his ministry he had endeavoured to make his preaching expository and explanatory of the Word of God as he understood it. Why so many people were tired of preaching was because some ministers merely took a text on which to hang pretty things, without any regard to its true meaning. If God thought it worth while to give them a book, surely they should give its truths the meaning which He designed.

In the course of that visit, a friend in New Zealand strongly urged Dr. Maclaren to write on John xiv. to xvii., "since he had the requisite nicety and delicacy of touch for so sacred a task;" and he replied, "with moist eyes and tremulous voice," that he should much like to do so.

The wish has been realised. Immediately after his return he commenced to preach from the fourteenth chapter, and he has now finished the sixteenth. The sermons have appeared week by week in the *Freeman*, and now his publishers issue a volume containing the series, called *The Holy of Holies.*

It is enough to mention Dr. Maclaren's sermons in order to recommend them. No finer volume of sermons has been published this season.

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THE CRITICAL REVIEW OF THEOLOGICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL LITERATURE.

EDITED BY PROFESSOR S. D. F. SALMOND, D.D. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark.

THE first number of the new Quarterly has been out for some weeks now, and has met with a welcome which proves at once the widespread desire for such a Review, and the success with which the editor has met it. Names like those of Dr. Rainy, Dr. Plummer, Professor Davidson, Canon Driver, Professor Bruce, Principal Reynolds, and Dr. Dods—to mention in order only the first round number—are a safe guarantee of scholarship and careful writing. The longer reviews are, on the whole, the most valuable, and also the most interesting; but we could name some of the shorter notices which have hit off the characteristics of their books with great skill. If the editor can provide 116 pages of matter for 1s. 6d. and keep it up to this mark, he need have no fear.