

[p.323]

CHAPTER VI.

ON SACRED CRITICISM, IN THE RELATIONS IT BEARS TO DIVINE INSPIRATION.

Here we must not be misunderstood. Far from us be the idea of attaching the smallest disfavour to works of sacred criticism! These, on the contrary, we honour we pronounce them necessary; we study them; we consider all ministers of the gospel bound to know them, and that the Christian church is bound to be warmly grateful to them. That is indeed a noble science! It is so because of its object; to study the destinies of the divine text, its canon, its manuscripts, its versions, its witnesses, and the innumerable authors who have quoted it! It is so because of the services it has rendered: how many triumphs achieved over infidelity, how many objections silenced, how many mischievous doubts for ever dissipated! it is so by its history: how many eminent men have consecrated to it either the devotedness of a pious life, or the might of the finest genius! . . . it is so, in fine, by its immense results, of which no one, perhaps, will ever know the measure if he has not studied it.

May God preserve us, then, from setting faith here against science; faith which lives on the truth against science which studies it! faith which goes and lays hold of it in the hand of its God, against science which seeks it elsewhere more indirectly, and which often finds it! All that is true in one place, is in pre-established harmony with all that is true in another more elevated place. Faith knows, then, from the first, and before

[p.224]

having seen any thing, that all truth will render testimony to it. All true science, be it what it may, is its friend; but sacred criticism is more than its friend - it is almost of its kindred. Nevertheless it is all this only as long as it remains true, and as it keeps its own place. The moment it quits it, it must be kept down; it then ceases to be a science; it is but a silly piece of guesswork. Now, as there are three temptations to wander from it, we desire here to recommend three precautions to young men studying it.

SECTION I.

SACRED CRITICISM IS A SCIENTIFIC INQUIRER, AND NOT A JUDGE.

First of all, critical science does not keep its place when, instead of being a scientific inquirer, it would be a judge; when, not content with collecting together the oracles of God, it sets about composing them, decomposing them, canonizing them, decanonizing them; and, when it gives forth oracles itself! Then it tends to nothing less than to subvert the faith from its foundation. This we proceed to demonstrate.

Employ your reason, your time, all the resources of your genius, to assure yourself whether the book which has been put into your hands, under the name of the Bible, contains, in fact, the same oracles, the first deposit of which was confided, under the divine Providence, to the Jewish people,¹ and of which the second deposit, under the same guarantee, was committed to the church universal of the apostolic times. Assure yourself, then, if this book be authentic, and if the copyists have not altered it. All this labour is legitimate, rational, honourable; it has been undertaken before you abundantly; and if the investigations of another have not satisfied you, resume them, follow

[p.325]

them out, get all the information in your power; all the churches of God will thank you. But when this work is over, when you have ascertained that the Bible is an authentic book, and that the unexceptionable seals of God Almighty are attached to it, then listen to what science and reason alike call to you; then listen to God; then *sursùm oculi, flexi poplites, sursùm corda!* then down upon your knees! lift up your hearts on high, in reverence, with profound humility! Then science and reason have no longer to judge, but to receive; no longer to pronounce, but to comprehend. There is still a task, and it is a science, if you will but it is no longer the same; it is that of understanding and submission.

But if your wisdom, on the contrary, after having received the Bible as an authentic book, makes bold to constitute itself the judge of what is found contained there; if, from this Scripture, which calls itself inspired, and which declares that it is, at the last day, to judge you yourself, that wisdom of yours dares to take away any thing; if, seating itself like the angels of the last judgment,² it drag the book of God to the seashore of science, in order to collect in its vessels what it sees in it to be good, and to throw out what it finds in it to be bad, if it pretend to separate there the thought of God from the thought of man; if, for example (to adduce but one trait among a thousand) it venture to deny, like Michaelis, that the first two chapters of Matthew are from God, because it does not approve the Scriptural quotations found in them; next, to deny the inspiration of Mark and that of Luke, because it has found them, it says, in contradiction with Matthew;³ in a word, if it think it has the power of subjecting the book, acknowledged to be authentic, to the outrageous control of its ignorance, and of its carnal sense; then, it is necessary that it should be reprovèd; it is guilty of

[p.326]

revolt, it judges God. Here there is no longer science, there is fascination; there is no longer progress, there is obscurantism.

One may judge of this, if he compare with this blundering of theologians on the word of God, the more rational procedure of physicians and naturalists in studying his works. Here, at least, people hold beforehand as an axiom, that all objects in creation answer to ends that are full of wisdom and harmony. Here science sets itself, not to contest these ends, but to discover them. Here, what people call progress, is not the daring rashness of controlling the works of their God; it is the good fortune to have sounded them, to have obtained a better recognition of their marvels, and to have been able to present them under some new aspects to the admiration of men.

¹ Rom. iii. 1, 2.

² Matt. xiii. 48, 49.

³ Introduction to the New Testament, by Michaelis, vol. ii. p. 17; vol i. pp. 206. 214 (English translation.)

Why, then, will Christians not do with the works of God in the works of redemption, what naturalists do with the works of God in creation? Why, if, even among the pagans, a physician - the great Galen - could say "that in describing the different parts of the human body, he was composing a hymn in honour of Him who has made us," will not the Christian comprehend that to describe with truth the various parts of the Word of God, would be always "composing a hymn in honour of Him who has made it?" Thus thought the apostolic fathers; thus the pious Irenæus, the disciple of Polycarp, the pupil of John. "The Scriptures are perfect," said he. "In the Scriptures let God always teach, and let man always learn! Thus it is that from the confused polyphony of their instructions, one sole and admirable symphony will make itself heard in us, praising by its hymns the God who has made all things."⁴

Were we to be told, there was a very studious na-

[p.827]

tion in existence, among whom the science of Nature, taking a new direction, had begun immense works with the purpose of establishing that there are mistakes in creation; plants badly constructed, animals ill conceived, organs ill adapted - what would you think of such a people and their grand attempt? Would you say that they effected any advance in science? Would you not rather conceive that they darkened and degraded it, and that people there were putting themselves to a deal of learned labour in finding out the art of being ignorant? While anatomists have been unable to explain the use of the liver in the human body, or of antennæ in that of insects, they have not on that account found nature in fault; they have put it all to the account of their own ignorance. Why, then, when you happen not yet to have discovered the use of something that is said in the Scriptures, do you lay the blame on any but yourselves, and why will you not wait?

This is no new idea. It is now sixteen hundred years since a godly man expressed it better than we have done, and preached it with unction to his contemporaries. "If ever, in reading Scriptures," says Origen, in the thirty-ninth of his homilies,⁵ "you happen to stumble on some thought which becomes for thee a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence, blame none but thyself (ἀίτιῶ σαυτόν); doubt not that this stone of stumbling and rock of offence has some great meaning (ἔχειν νοήματα), and is to fulfil that promise, 'He that believeth shall not be confounded.' - (Rom. ix. 33.) Begin, then, with believing; and soon you will find, under this imaginary stumbling-block, a *plentiful and holy utility*.⁶ If we have received the commandment not to speak idle words, for we shall give account thereof at the last judgment, how much more ought we to think, with regard to God's prophets, that every word proceeding from their mouth had its object to effect and its utility!⁷ I believe, then, that for those who know how to make use of the virtue

[p.328]

⁴ "Sic, per dictionum multas voces, una consonans melodia in nobis sentietur, laudans hymnis Deum qui fecit omnia." According to the Greek, as preserved by John Damascenus: Διὰ τῆς τῶν λέξεων πολυφωνίας, ἐν σύμφωνον μέλος ἡμῖν αἰσθήσεται (Adv. Hæreses, lib. ii. c. 47.)

⁵ Origenes adamantius, Hom. xxxix. in Jerem. xlv. 22.

⁶ Πολλὴν ὠφέλειαν ἅγιαν.

⁷ Ἐργατικὸν ἦν.

of the Scriptures, each of the letters written in the oracles of God, has its object and its use (ἐργάζεται), even to an iota and single jot.... And in like manner as among plants, there is not one which has not its Virtue; and, nevertheless, it belongs only to those who have acquired a knowledge of botany to be able to tell us how each ought to be applied and prepared in order to its becoming useful; so likewise whoever is a *holy and spiritual botanist of the Word of God* (τὶς βοτανικός ἐστὶν ὁ ἅγιος καὶ πνευματικός), he, collecting each iota and each element, will find the virtue of that ‘Word, and will perceive that nothing in that which is written is superfluous (ὅτι οὐδὲν παρέλκει). Would you have another comparison? Every member of our body has its office for which it has been placed there by the great Architect. Nevertheless, it belongs not to all to be acquainted with its use and virtue, but only to those physicians who have occupied themselves with anatomy..... Well, then, I consider the Scriptures as *the collection of the plants of the Word*, or as the perfect body of the Word. But if thou art neither botanist of the Scriptures nor anatomist of the prophetic words, go not to imagine that there is any thing superfluous there; and when you have been unable to find the reason for that which is written, blame not the holy letters; lay the blame on thyself alone.”⁸ Thus spake Origen; but we might have found thoughts quite to the same effect in other fathers, and particularly in Irenæus,⁹ who lived still nearer the apostolic times.

However, we must further bid the reader remark, that this pretending to judge the Word of God over-throws all the foundations of the faith. It would even render it impossible in the hearts of all who are but a little consistent. This it is but too easy to demonstrate.

In order that a soul receive life, it must receive faith;

[p.329]

in order that it may have faith, it must believe God; in order that it believe God, it must begin with renouncing the prejudices of its own wisdom on sin, on the future, on the judgment, on grace, on itself, on the world, on God, on all things Is it not written that the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, that lie even cannot receive them, and that they are foolishness unto him?¹⁰ The gospel, accordingly, will shock his reason or his conscience, or both. And yet he must submit upon the sole testimony of God; and it is not until after having thus settled his relation to it, that he will recognize it as being “the wisdom of God and the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.” He must believe, then, without having seen; that is to say, the gospel, before he has comprehended it, ought to confound his own wisdom, revolt his natural heart, buffet his pride, and condemn his own righteousness! How then would you ever get it to be accepted by men who would, like you, wait to have every thing approved, before receiving every thing? Imbued with your principles, they will impute to man in the Scriptures every thing that shocks their natural feelings. They will think that they ought to retrench from it the *prejudices* of the apostles on the consequences of Adam’s sin, on the Trinity, on the expiation, on eternal punishments, on the gehenna, on the resurrection of the body, on the doctrine of devils, on election, on the gratuitous justification of the sinner by faith, perhaps also on miracles. How shall a man, if he be unhappy enough to imitate you, ever find life, peace, and joy, by means of faith? How shall he hope against hope? How shall he believe that he is ever saved, wretched man that he

⁸ And he adds, Τοῦτο μοι τὸ προοίμιον εἴρηται καθολικῶς χρήσιμον εἶναι δυναμένον εἰς ὅλην τὴν γραθὴν, ἵνα προτρέπωσιν οἱ θέλοντες προσέχειν τῇ ἀνάγνωσει, μὴδὲν παραπέμπεσθαι ἀναξέταστον καὶ ἀνεξερεῦνητον γραμμᾶ.

⁹ Irenæus, Adv. Hæres., lib. ii. cap. 47.

¹⁰ 1 Cor. ii. 14.

is? He will have to pass his days lost in vague, misty, uncertain doctrines! and his life, his peace, his love, his obedience must remain, until death, such as his doctrines are! We conclude, then, with this first advice: Make critical science a learned inquirer; don't make it a judge.

[p.330]

SECTION II.

LET SACRED CRITICISM BE AN HISTORIAN, NOT A SOOTHSAYER.

There is, in relation to the inspiration of the Scriptures, one other not less important precaution, which we must point out in the use that is made of science.

The task of sacred criticism is to collect facts on the Scriptures: do not suffer her to engage you in vain hypotheses; there she will do you much mischief. She ought to be an historian; make her not a prophetess. When she divines, do not listen to her; turn your back upon her; for she will dissipate your time, and more than your time. Now, the believer's safeguard here is still the doctrine of inspiration such as we have exhibited it; I mean of the inspiration, not of the men, but of the book.

All Scripture is divinely inspired: such is the declaration of the authentic book of the Scriptures. But as for what passed in the understanding and in the conscience of the sacred writers, that is hardly ever revealed to us, and it is what we are not required to know. Much time and many words have been lost owing to men having neglected this grand principle. Scripture is inspired, whether the author knew or did not know beforehand what God was making him write. In such researches, therefore, as studying in each book of the Bible the particularities of its style, of its language, of its reasoning, and all the circumstances of its sacred writer, we can see nothing but good; they are useful, legitimate, respectful; and it is in these, certainly, there is science. Should the student proceed to endeavour, by these same characters, to fix its date, and the occasion of its being written, still we can perceive nothing but what is instructive and becoming in such an investigation. It may be well, for example, to know

[p.331]

that it was under Nero that Paul wrote to the Jews,¹¹ enjoining them "to be subject to the powers that be." It may be useful to know, that Peter had been married more than twenty-three years when Paul reminded the Corinthians¹² that he (the first of the popes, as he is called) still continued, in all his apostolic journeyings, to lead his wife about with him, and that the other apostles, and James himself (who was reputed the first of the pillars of the church¹³), did the same thing. In this, too, there is science. We highly value, for the sake of the church of God, all labour which enables it to comprehend better a passage, aye, were it but a single word of holy Scripture. But to proceed from that to crude hypotheses on the sacred writers, to make what they say depend on the haphazard of their presumed

¹¹ Rom. xiii. 1.

¹² 2 Cor. ix, 5.

¹³ Gal. ii. 9.

circumstances, instead of considering their circumstances as prepared and willed by God for what they were to teach, to subordinate the nature, the abundance, or the conciseness of their teachings to the concurrence, more or less fortuitous, of their ignorances, or their recollections - this is to degrade inspiration; it is to lay the foundations of infidelity; it is to forget that “the men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost (φερόμενοι), not with words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but with those which the Holy Ghost teacheth.”¹⁴

Did the evangelists, it has been asked, read each other? And of what consequence is this to me, provided they were “moved by the Spirit;” and if, after the example of the Thessalonians, I receive their book, not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the word of God?¹⁵ The putting of this question, we may remark in passing, may be very innocent, but it is no longer so in the manner in which it is treated, and in the importance that is attached to it.

When people inquire whether John had read the gospels of the other three; whether Mark and Luke

[p.332]

had read the gospel of Matthew before writing their own (as Dr Mill¹⁶ and Professor Hug¹⁷ would have it, and as Dr Lardner¹⁸ and Professor Michaelis¹⁹ would not have it); when it is asked whether they only caused to be transcribed with discernment the most important portions of the oral tradition (as Dr Gieseler²⁰ would have it); when on these huge volumes are written, in attack or defence of these systems, as if faith and even science were really interested in them, and as if great things behoved to result from them to the Christian church; when it is affirmed that the three first evangelists had consulted some original document now lost, Greek according to some, Hebrew according to others (an idea first conceived by Le Clerc, and taken up sixty years after him by Messrs Kopp, Michaelis, Lessing, Niemeyer, Eichhorn, and others²¹); when people plunge still deeper into this romantic field; when they reach at last a drama so complicated as the Bishop of Landaff’s,²² with his first Hebrew historical document, his second Hebrew dogmatical document, his third document, his fourth document (a translation of the first), then his documents of the second class, formed by the translation of Luke and Mark and Matthew, which brings the sources at last to the number of seven, without reckoning three more of them peculiar to St Luke and St Mark; or further still, with Mr Veysie²³ in England, and Dr Gieseler in Germany, we would trace up either the three first gospels, or the four gospels, to apocryphal narratives in previous circulation in the Christian churches; when, with the first of these doctors, people will have it that Mark copied them with a more literal exactness than Luke, on account, it is said, of his igno-

[p.333]

¹⁴ 1 Cor. ii. 13; 2 Pet. 1. 21.

¹⁵ 1 Thess. ii. 13.

¹⁶ Millii Proleg., § 108.

¹⁷ Einleitung in die Schriften des Neuen Testaments. Stuttgart 1821.

¹⁸ Vol. vi. p. 220-250.

¹⁹ Introduction, &c., vol. i. p. 112-129.

²⁰ Historisch-kritischer Versuch, &c. Minden 1818.

²¹ Horne’s introd. vol. ii. p. 443, edit. 1818.

²² Bishop Marsh’s *Michaëlis*, vol. iii. part ii. p. 361.

²³ Veysie’s Examination, p. 56.

rance of Greek, while Matthew, first written in Hebrew, must, beyond doubt, have been afterwards translated into Greek by some one, who must have modified it out of Mark and Luke, and transmitted it to us at last in the state in which we possess it; when, not content with sketching these systems in a few phrases, as a task of passing curiosity, people have written thereon so many and such bulky volumes, as if the interests of the kingdom of God were involved in them, oh! we cannot avoid saying that we experience, in the view of all this science, a profound sense of grief! But after all, is this science? No! these are no longer scientific inquirers - they have forsaken facts - they prophetize the history of the past; these are the astrologers of theology. It is thought, in astronomy, that a book of observations on the smallest satellite discovered near Uranus, or on the finding of a second of parallax in the case of some star, or on a single spot measured in the moon, is a precious acquisition for science, whilst all the writings of the Count de Boulainvilliers, and the three hundred volumes on the Barbaric sphere, on the influences, the aspects, or the horoscopes of the seven planetary bodies, can be for it no better than a piece of folly, or a useless encumbrance. Thus we should set a higher value, in the pursuits of sacred criticism, on whatever might throw some surer light on the smallest passage of the Scriptures; but what end could all these crude hypotheses ever serve? In these, people desert the luminous paths of science, as well as those of faith; they weary themselves in the pursuit of empty nothings! Vain and noisy toil expended in misty conjectures formed upon the clouds! Nothing good can come down from them! Wretched pursuits, which teach men to doubt where God teaches them to believe! "Who is he," saith the Lord, "who darkens, by words without knowledge, the counsels of the Most High?"

In fact, would that we could say that there was nothing there beyond idle fancies, and an enormous loss of time! But in these, people do much worse than

[p.334]

waste their precious hours: they lose their faith there; they fascinate their mind's eyes; they draw away young students from the great and first Author of the Scriptures. It is clear that these idle pursuits can proceed only from a want of faith in the inspiration of the Scriptures. Believe, for one moment, that Jesus Christ had given to his apostles (the *πῶς καὶ τί*, Matt. x. 19, 20) the what and the how that they were to speak; admit that the Holy Ghost made them relate the life of Jesus Christ, as he made them relate his sitting at the right hand of God, and you instantly perceive that all these hypotheses vanish into nothing. Not only do they teach you nothing, they cannot teach you any thing; but they put your believing thoughts into a wrong track; they gradually undermine the doctrine of inspiration; they indirectly weaken God's testimony, its certainty, its perfection. They turn the thoughts of your piety from their true direction; they mislead those young persons who were looking for the living waters from the wells of the Scriptures, and who are drawn away to heal themselves amid the sands, far from the springs that gush up into eternal life. What, after all, will they find there? Broken cisterns, clouds without water, and at most, perhaps fantastic streams, gleaming to them for some days in the sun, like a deceitful mirage on the deserts of human thought.

What would you say of a learned divine who should endeavour to trace the discourses and the doctrines of Jesus Christ to the instructions of Joseph the carpenter, or to the lessons of the school at Nazareth? Idle and pernicious task, you would exclaim. Well, then, the same must be said of all those conjectural systems which would, on human principles, explain the composition of the Scriptures. Idle and pernicious, we say! Admit inspiration, and all this labour vanishes like an idle dream. The Scriptures are the word of God; they are given by

him, and we know that no prophecy ever came by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy

[p.335]

Ghost.²⁴ The story of Paul's nephew giving warning to his uncle in the prison of Antonia, is inspired by God, although Luke may have heard it twenty times from the mouth of the apostle before receiving it from the Holy Ghost. That story is inspired, equally with the account of the invisible angel who was commissioned by God to strike the king of the Jews upon his throne, in the city of Cesarea. The account given us of Jacob's ring-straked and speckled sheep is from God, as well as that of the creation of the heavens and the earth. The history of the fall of Ananias and Sapphira is as divinely inspired, as is that of the fall of Satan and his angels.

Ah! no doubt the evangelists had one common document after which these holy men of God spoke; but as has been so well said by Bishop Gleig,²⁵ that document was neither more nor less than just the preaching and the life of our divine Saviour. That was their prototype.

Accordingly, when you hear it asked, from what documents Matthew could have taken his account of the birth of Jesus Christ? Luke, that of his early years? Paul, the Saviour's appearance to St James, or the Saviour's words on the blessedness of giving? whence Hosea took what he says of the tears of Jacob? and Jude, Enoch's prophecy? and Michael's contention about the body of Moses? - you may reply, that they were derived from the same source from which Moses learned the creation of the heaven and the earth.

We have shown how sound views on the inspiration of the Scriptures, will preserve youthful students from being led into the two grand errors of modern criticism, and at the same time enable them to derive from that noble science the utmost possible amount of good. The former of these errors, we have said, consists in pretending to subject the Scriptures to our judgment, after

[p.336]

having admitted their authenticity; the latter consists in indulging dangerous conjectures on the sacred books. But we have still to make an important reflexion on the relations of learning to the great question which occupies us.

SECTION III.

SACRED CRITICISM IS THE DOORKEEPER OF THE TEMPLE, NOT ITS GOD.

This reflexion will present itself at once under the form of an advice and of an argument. But let not this alarm the reader. We venture on the advice only as a prelude to the argument; for

²⁴ 2 Pet. i. 21.

²⁵ Remarks on Michaelis' Introd. to the New Testament, the 32d and following pages. Horne's Introd. ii. p. 458. Ed. 1818.

we do not forget that our task in this book is to establish the fact of the divine inspiration, not to preach it. To begin with the advice; it is as follows:-

Learning is a doorkeeper who conducts you to the temple of the Scriptures. Never forget, then, that she is not the God, and that her house is not the temple. In other terms, when you study sacred criticism, beware of keeping to that, even as regards learning. She leaves you in the street; you must enter. And now for the argument.

If you penetrate, in fact, into the sanctuary of the Scriptures, then not only will you find inscribed by the hand of God on all its walls that God fills it, and that he is every where there, but, further, you will receive the proof of it experimentally. There you will behold him every where; there you will feel him every where. In other terms, when one reads God's oracles with care, he not only meets with the frequent declaration of their entire inspiration, but, further, through unexpected strokes, and often through a single verse or the power of a single word, he receives a profound conviction of the divinity stamped upon it throughout.

As regards advice, it must not be imagined that we

[p.337]

have given it with the view of discrediting learned investigations; we offer it, on the contrary, in their interest, and in order to their completion. In fact, it too often happens that a prolonged course of study, devoted to the extrinsic parts of the sacred book (its history, its manuscripts, its versions, its language), by entirely absorbing the attention of the men who give themselves to it, leaves them inattentive to its more intrinsic attributes, its meaning, its object, the moral power which displays itself there, the beauties that reveal themselves there, the life that diffuses itself there. And as there exist, nevertheless, necessary relations between these essential attributes and those exterior forms, two great evils result from this pre-occupation of the mind. By this absorption the student stifles his spiritual life as a man, and compromises final salvation. This, however, is not the evil we have to do with in these pages: as a learned inquirer, he compromises his science by it, and renders himself incapable of forming a sound estimate of the very objects of his studies. His learning is wanting in coherence and consistency, and from that very cause becomes contracted and creeping. How can a man become acquainted with, the temple, when he has seen but the stones, and knows nothing of the Shekinah? Can the types be understood, when he has not even a suspicion of their antitype? he has seen but altars, sheep, knives, utensils, blood, fire, incense, costumes, and ceremonies; he has not beheld the world's redemption, futurity, heaven, the glory of Jesus Christ! And, in this state, he has been unable so much as to comprehend the relations which these external objects have amongst themselves, because he has not comprehended their harmony with the whole.

A learned man, without faith, living in the days of Noah, who had studied the structure of the ark, would have lost his soul, no doubt; but, further, he would have remained ignorant of a great part of the very objects which he pretended to appreciate.

[p.338]

Suppose that a Roman traveller, in the days of Pompey the Great, had wished to describe Jerusalem and its temple. Arriving in the city on a Sabbath day, he repairs to the holy place with his guide; he makes the tour of it; he admires its enormous stones; he measures its

porticoes; he inquires about its antiquity and the names of the architects; he passes through its gigantic gates, which two hundred men daily open at sunrise and shut again at noon; there he sees arriving by thousands, in regular order, the Levites and choristers in their linen habits; and while in the interior, the sons of Aaron perform their rites; while the psalms of the prophet king resound under the sacred vaults, and thousands of choristers, accompanying them with their instruments, respond to each other in their sublime antiphonies; while the law is read, the word preached, and the souls that look for the consolation of Israel are lifted up with delight to the glories that are invisible, and filled with the deepest awe in contemplating that God “with whom there is plenteous redemption;” while aged Simeons are raising their thoughts to “that glorious salvation unceasingly waited for;” while sinners are turning to God; while more than one poor publican strikes upon his breast; while more than one poor widow, with joyous emotion, takes out her two mites for God’s treasury; and while so many invisible but ardent prayers are rising towards heaven; - what may we suppose our traveller to be doing? Why, counting the pillars, admiring the pavements, measuring the courts, scrutinizing the congregation, taking drawings of the altar of incense, the candlestick, the table of shewbread, the golden censer; after which, he walks off, mounts to the battlements of the fortress, goes down to the Xystus and to the brook Kedron, makes the circuit of the walls, counting his steps as he goes, and then returns to his quarters, there to write out his observations amid to prepare his book. No doubt, he might boast of his having seen the Hebrew nation, and their worship and temple; he might publish his jour-

[p.339]

ney, and find numerous readers; but, even with respect to the scientific knowledge which his book is meant to diffuse, how many errors of judgment will be found in it! and how many errors would the worshippers in the temple have to refute in it!

Here, then, is the advice we proffer, in the sole interests of your theological learning. It necessarily follows, from the necessary relations that subsist betwixt the eternal ends contemplated by God in his Word and its external forms, that, in order to judge correctly of the latter, you must first have made yourselves acquainted with the former.

If you would form a judgment of a physician, you would no doubt desire to know what country he is from, what has been his course of study, what universities he has attended, and what testimonials he can produce; but should he be the first to tell you what are your most latent disorders; should he reveal to you sensations in your system which you have hitherto vaguely felt, and the secret reality of which you recognize as soon as he has defined them to you; should he, above all, prescribe and supply the only remedy that could ever give you relief; would not such an experience tell you far more about him than his diplomas can do?

Well, then, the following is the counsel we venture to give to all such of our readers as have made any acquaintance with sacred criticism. Read the Bible, study the Bible by itself and for itself; ask it, if you like, where it has taken its degrees, and in what school its writers have studied; but come to its consultations, as a sick person eager to be cured; be as careful to make the experience of its words, as you can have been in studying its language and its history; and then, not only will you be healed (which is not the question at issue here), but you will be enlightened. “he that healed me said: Take up thy bed and walk! Whether he be a sinner I know not: one thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see!”²⁶

²⁶ John ix. 25.

[p.340]

Here the author would take occasion to mention what a thirst he felt for apologetical books during his youthful studies; how Abbadie, Leslie, Huet, Turretine, Grotius, Littleton, Jennings, Ranhardt, and Chalmers formed his habitual reading; and how, while tormented with a thousand doubts, he came at last to be convinced and satisfied only by the word itself of the Scriptures. That word gives testimony to itself, not only by its assertions, but by its effects, like light, like heat, like life, like health; for it carries in its beams health, life, heat, and light. A man might prove to me, by correct calculations, that at this moment the sun ought to be above the horizon; but can I have any need of these, if my eye behold him, if I am bathed in his beams and invigorated by them?

Read the Bible, then; do not be learned by halves; let every thing have its proper place. It is the Bible that will convince you. It will tell you whether it came from God. And when you shall have heard a voice there, sometimes more powerful than the sound of mighty waters, sometimes soft and still as the sound that fell on the ear of Elijah: "The Lord, merciful and compassionate, the God who is pitiful, slow to wrath, abundant in mercy, the God of all consolation, the God who pardons so much, and more !!" . . . ah, then, we venture to tell you beforehand, that the simple reading of a psalm, of a story, of a precept, of a verse, of a word in a verse, will, ere long, attest the divine inspiration of all the Scriptures to you more powerfully than could have been done by all the most solid reasonings of doctors or of books. Then you will see, you will know by experience, that God is every where in the Scriptures; then you will not ask of them if they are inspired; for you will feel them to be quick and powerful searchers of the thoughts and desires of the heart, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the dividing asunder of your soul and spirit, and of your joints and marrow, causing your tears to flow from a deep and unknown source, overthrowing you with resistless

[p.341]

power, and raising you up again with such a tenderness, and such sympathies, as are found only in God.

All this is as yet mere advice; but we proceed to show in what respect, nevertheless, these considerations may be presented, if not as a proof, at least as a strong presumption, in favour of the inspiration of the very words of Scripture. In them, in fact, we indicate to our readers a threefold experience, which at all times has borne the fruit of profound convictions among other Christians, and the testimony rendered by which ought, at least, to strike them as demanding the most serious consideration.

One of the strongest proofs, no doubt, of the divine authority of the Scriptures, is that majesty of theirs which fills us with respect and awe; it is the imposing unity of that book, the composition of which extends over a period of fifteen hundred years, and which has had so many authors, some of whom wrote no less than two centuries before the fabulous times of Hercules, Jason, and the Argonauts; others in the heroic days of Priam, Achilles, and Agamemnon; others in the days of Thales and Pythagoras; others in the age of Seneca, Tacitus, Plutarch, Tiberius, and Domitian; and who all, nevertheless, pursue one and the same plan, constantly advancing, as if they had all understood each other, towards one sole grand end, the history of the world's redemption by the Son of God; it is this vast harmony of all

the Scriptures; this Old Testament filled with Jesus Christ, as well as the New; this universal history, which nothing stops, which tells of the revolutions of empire to the end of time, and which, when its scenes of the past have come to a close, continues them onward with those of the future, until the moment arrive when all the world's empires shall have become the possession of Jesus Christ and his saints:- at the first page, the earth created for the reception of sinless man; in the following pages, the earth cursed for the reception of man ever sinning; at the last page, a new earth for the reception of man who will never sin more! - at the first page, the tree of

[p.342]

life interdicted, paradise lost, sin entering into the world by the first Adam, and death by sin; at the last page, paradise found again, life again entering into the world by the second Adam, death vanquished, no more sorrow to be found, God's image restored in man, and the tree of life in the midst of the paradise of God. Assuredly there is in this majestic whole, commencing before there were men, and continued on to the end of time, a powerful and altogether heavenly unity; a convergence of long ages, universal, immense, whose grandeur captivates thought, transcends all our human conceptions, and proclaims its Author's divinity as irresistibly as, on a summer night, the view of a sky glittering with stars, and the thought of all those shining worlds which revolve night and day in the immensity of space. "Myriads of things in perfect intimacy and symphony," says one of the earliest fathers of the Church.²⁷ And yet, over and above the beauties presented by time Scriptures, viewed thus as a whole, we have to contemplate something not less glorious, which reveals to us also the divine action in their smallest parts, and attests to us their verbal inspiration.

Three orders of persons, or rather three orders of experiences, testify to this.

1. And first, if you consult ministers who have spent their whole lives in meditating on the Scriptures, with the view of finding daily nourishment from them for the Lord's flocks, they will tell you that the more they have given themselves to this blessed study, and have set themselves to look more narrowly into the oracles of God, the more also has their admiration of the letter of that Word increased. Surprised, as they proceed, by unexpected beauties, they have recognised in these, even in the most minute expressions, instances of divine foresight, profound mutual bearings, spiritual grandeurs which reveal themselves there by the sole fact of a more exact translation, or of the attention of the mind being

[p.343]

longer directed to the detail of a single verse. They will tell you that the man of God who keeps for some time close to the eyes of his soul some text of that holy book, soon feels himself called to adopt the language of the naturalist who, with the microscope, studies a leaf from the forest, with its integuments, its nerves, its thousand pores, and its thousand vessels. He that made the forest made the leaf! he exclaims; yes, says the other, and he who made the Bible, made its verses also!

2. A second order of experiences, of which we would here cite the testimony, is that of the interpreters of the prophecies. All of them will tell you with what evidence, after one has bestowed some time on that study, it is perceived that in these miraculous pages every verse,

²⁷ "Μυρία φίλα καὶ σύμφωνκ." Theophilus ad Autolyc., lib. i. cap. 36. See also Justin Martyr, ad Græcos cohort., c. 8.

every word, without any exception, and even down to apparently the most indifferent particle, must have been guaranteed by God. The slightest alteration in a verb, in an adverb, or even in the simplest conjunction, might lead an interpreter into the most serious error. And it has often been remarked, that if the prophecies that are now fulfilled were ill understood before the event, this arose, in a great measure, from the circumstance that people had not examined, with sufficient attention, all the details of their text. Of this we might adduce many examples.

3. But there is yet another order of persons who attest to us more loudly, if possible, the divine inspiration of the Scriptures, even in their smallest parts; these are Christians who have experienced their power, first in their conversion, and afterwards in the conflicts that followed. Go, and in the biographies of those who have been great in the kingdom of God, look for the moment at which they passed from death unto life; inquire, around you, about the same fact, of the Christians who in their turn have experienced this virtue of the Word of God: they will all bear one unanimous testimony. When the holy Scripture, overmastering their conscience, made them lie low at the foot of the cross, and there revealed to them the love of God, what

[p.344]

seized hold of them was not the Bible as a whole, it was not a chapter, it was a verse; aye, a word, which was for them like the humble and powerful knob of the electric pile, the disks of which should mount to heaven, or, as it were, the point of a sword wielded by the very hand of God. They found it quick and powerful. It was an influence from above which was concentrated in a single word, and which made it become for them, “as a fire, saith time Lord, and as a hammer that breaketh the stone.”²⁸ They perused, in the moment of their need, a psalm, or some words of the prophets, or some sentences from the epistles, or some narratives of sacred history; and as they were reading, behold, a word seized their conscience with an unknown, sweeping, irresistible force. It was no more than a single word, hut that word remained upon their soul; there it spoke, there it preached, there it resounded, as if all the church bells of the city of God had been struck to call him to fasting, to the bending of the knee, to prayer, to meeting with Jesus Christ! It was but a word, but that word was from God. It was but one of apparently the meanest chords of the harp from heaven; but that chord was so stretched as to be in unison with the heart of man; it gave forth unexpected sounds, all-powerful harmonies, which stirred their inmost souls; and then they felt that those tones are miraculous, that those harmonies proceed from heaven. They knew it to be the call of Jesus Christ.

Such, then, is the voice of the Church; such has been in every age the unanimous testimony of the saints. The inspiration which the Bible attributes to itself, they have said, we ourselves have experienced. We believe it, no doubt, because it attests it; but we believe it also because we have seen it, and because we ourselves can bear to it the testimony of a blessed experience, amid of an irresistible impulse of feeling.

One might adduce such examples by thousands. Let

[p.345]

²⁸ Jer. xxiii. 29.

us be content to name here two of the noblest minds that have ever served as guides to humanity. Let the reader call to his recollection how the two greatest lights of ancient and modern times were kindled. It was a word - a single word of the Scriptures which, just at the moment that had been prepared by God, put into their souls the light of the Holy Ghost.

Luther, while as yet a monk, went off to Rome. He lay ill a-bed at Bologna, in a foreign land, overwhelmed with the burden of his guilt, and believing himself to be at the gates of death. It was then that the 17th verse of the 1st chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, "*Justus ex fide vivet*" - "the just shall live by faith" - came like a beam from heaven, and enlightened his whole being. These simple words seized him twice with a superhuman power; first at Bologna, there to fill him with inexpressible energy and peace; after that at Rome itself, there to check and elevate him, while with an idolatrous crowd he dragged himself on both knees up Pilate's fabulous staircase. It was with these words that the Reformation of the West commenced. "Words of creative power for the Reformer and the Reformation," exclaims on this subject my precious friend Merle D'Aubigné. It was by them that God then said, "Let there be light, and there was light."²⁹ "In truth," says the Reformer himself, "I felt as if entirely born again; and these words were for me the very gate of paradise." "*Hic me prorsus renatum esse sensi, et apertis portis in ipsum paradysum intrasse.*"

Here, too, shall we not call to mind the greatest of the doctors of Christian antiquity (the admirable Augustine), when, in his garden near Milan, wretched, ill at ease, feeling, as Luther felt a tempest in his soul, as he reclined under a fig-tree, "*jactans voces miserabiles et dimittens habenas lacrymis,*" groaning, and giving vent to a flood of tears, he heard from an adjoining house that youthful voice, which sang, with

[p.346]

a rapid repetition of the burthen of the song: "*Tolle, lege! tolle, lege!*" "Take and read; take and read!" He went off to the neighbourhood of Alypius for the roll of the Epistles of Paul, which he had left there; (*adripui, aperui et legi in silentio*) - he grasped it, opened it, and read in silence the first chapter that caught his eye. And when he came to the 13th verse. of the xiii. chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, then all was decided by a word. Jesus had overcome: the grand career of the holiest of the doctors began its course. A word, but a word from God, had lighted up that mighty beacon which was to illuminate ten centuries of the church's existence, and whose rays delight her still. After thirty-one years of revolt, of conflicts, of relapses, of wretchedness, faith, life, peace had descended into that loving soul; a new light, but an everlasting light, had risen upon it. After these words, he wanted nothing more; he shut the book, he tells us; he no longer felt doubt. "*Nec ultra volui legere, nec opus erat;*" for with the close of that sentence, a stream of light and security was poured into his soul; and all the night of his doubts had vanished. "*Statim quippe cum fine hujus sententiæ, quasi luce securitatis infuses cordi meo, omnes dubitationis tenebræ dffugerunt!*"

There is one experience more of the same kind with which we have been too deeply struck not to refer to it in these pages, although its testimony may probably be admitted by those only who are already pious men. The farther a man advances in the Christian life - the more abundant the measure he receives of God's Spirit - the more, also, you must have observed what, in two contrary senses, on the one hand, our sacred books, and, on the other, the best

²⁹ See Preface to the History of the Reformation.

writings of men, become for him. While you will see him ever more and more independent of the latter, because more fully aware that they have hardly any thing more to teach him, or at least, because, after having read them once, he has re-

[p.347]

ceived all that they have to give him, mark with admiration how very much otherwise it is for him with respect to the divine sayings, and with what a marvellous contrast he is seen to be ever more attached to the letter of the Scriptures, ever more convinced of the wisdom that is revealed there, and of the divine power put forth there, ever more eager to drink in their slightest expressions, ever more capable of deriving delicious nourishment, for whole days and nights, from a single passage, and from a single verse! Certainly, there is in this fact, to the person who has witnessed it, something peculiarly striking. We ourselves have seen it.

Such, then, is the triple testimony which we would invoke, and by which the Church attests to us that an influence from God has been infused into the smallest parts of the sacred Word, in such wise, that “all Scripture is divinely inspired.”

We must, however, be properly understood. We have made no pretension here to impose upon some the experience of others. Proofs from feeling, are proofs to those alone who have felt. They have, no doubt, an irresistible force for men who, having experienced them, have seen the testimonies of the Word confirmed in them with unquestionable evidence; but nothing would be less logical than to offer them as demonstrations to souls who are strangers to them. If you have had these experiences, you will be more than convinced, and we should have no more to say to you. Accordingly, we have presented them only as strong historical presumptions, to dispose you in this way to receive with readier submission the Scriptural proofs already put before you. A whole multitude of well-informed and pious persons, we say, attest to you for ages past, and by a threefold experience, that in the close study of the Word of God, one is brought to recognise, on the clearest evidence, its inspiration, even in its words. Let this act, at least, as a powerful recommendation to listen with respect and candour to the testimonies in

[p.348]

which the Bible itself has told you what it is. At least, let this voice of the church call to you, as it were, from an adjoining house, *Take and read, take and read! adripe, aperi, lege in silentio!* Read it in silence; and you yourself will feel how far its inspiration goes. No more doubt, you will say, like Augustine; for the morning star has risen in my heart; and you will not need to read more. *Nec ultra voles legere, nec opus erit; statim quippe cum fine unius sententiæ, quasi luce securitatis infuses cordi tuo, omnes dubitationis tenebræ diffugient!*

Converted to pdf format by Robert I Bradshaw, September 2004.

<http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/>
